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‘Who are you to know who I am?’  
A Comprehensive Study of Youth at Risk

by

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Thesis

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**WARWICK**

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## Declarations

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

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- Schmitsek, S. (2015). Individual study pathways in Copenhagen II. [Egyeni tanulási utak Koppenhágában II.]. *Education Sciences- Education-Research-Innovation*. 2015 (4), 82-95. Retrieved from: <http://nevelestudomany.elte.hu/index.php/2015/10/egyeni-tanulasi-utak-koppenhagaban-i/?lang=en>
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## **Abstract**

My research explored the educational experiences of young people who had been at risk of dropping out and/or who had dropped out of secondary education, and subsequently went on to obtain a qualification at a second chance provision. Second chance provisions are designed to support the acquisition of self-efficacy and career adaptability, which led them to pursue their career in higher education and/or in the labour market.

Social constructionism acts as an overarching theory because it postulates that knowledge is both situated and relative, which helps explore the situation of young people in different policy contexts. This thesis presents a comparative research study of comprehensive measures related to Early School Leaving (ESL) in Denmark, England and Hungary. The comprehensive strategies and policy contexts developed and implemented to combat ESL in these three European countries were found to be substantially distinctive when their differences and similarities were examined. The organisations offering second chance provision that were chosen for this research are all members of the Association of European Cities and Second Chance Schools (E2C), which implies that the teaching methodology is different from the mechanisms in use in mainstream education.

The doctoral research is based on comparative fieldwork in three urban areas, allocated pseudonyms as follows: Øresund City (Denmark), Paprika City (Hungary) and Grey Town (England). The fieldwork was carried out over the course of 14 months. Empirical data were collected from observations conducted in second chance provisions; a total of 28 interviews with former students; and a total of 21 interviews with a range of stakeholders including policy makers, teachers, and career counsellors.

By listening to the voices of former students, the analysis focusses on the relevance and importance of different sources of support with special regard to positive relationships, such as those between the teacher/career counsellor/social worker and the student, as well as peer support as motivators to sustain or re-establish engagement in education. Data analysis chapters concentrate on how young people described their career at school, their negative experiences in mainstream settings and their learning pathways in second chance provisions. Special attention was paid to their interpretations about the influences, which they considered beneficial to their careers in education and later in their adult life.

Interviews with these stakeholders and grass roots professionals were used to gain insight into the policy context of the three countries. The thesis concludes with policy recommendations based on the findings of the study.

My original contribution to knowledge is a qualitative cross-national comparative study, which focussed on students' lives and career trajectories with a comparative lens in depth. Therefore, the qualitative research described herein had the potential to be more sensitive to the micro-processes of students' experiences in education and in the labour market, and moreover, their impacts on young people's well-being and future perspectives to give a more distinct image of dropouts in three different policy contexts.

## Abbreviations

Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (url: <a href="http://www.cedefop.europa.eu">http://www.cedefop.europa.eu</a> )
E2C	the Association of European Cities and Second Chance Schools
EC	European Commission
ELET	Early Leavers from Education and Training
ELGPN	European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (url: <a href="http://elgpn.eu">http://elgpn.eu</a> )
EP	European Parliament
ESL	Early School Leaving
EU	European Union GC Guidance Counsellor
IER	Institute for Employment Research
ILP	Individual Learning Programme
IPT	Identity Process Theory
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LTCC	Learning Theory of Careers Counselling
NCS	National Careers Service
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NESSE	Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and training (url: <a href="http://www.ness.fr/ness/">http://www.ness.fr/ness/</a> )
NET	Not in Education or Training
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RESL	Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe (url: <a href="http://www.resl-eu.org">http://www.resl-eu.org</a> )
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SLT	Speech and Language Therapist
STF	Systems Theory Framework
VET	Vocational Education and Training
YGCC	Youth Guidance Counselling Centre
YGCØ	the Youth Guidance Centre of Øresund
YSS	Øresund Youth School System

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Tackling Early School Leaving: the state of the art

European education policy directives, following a human capital approach, have placed great emphasis on the creation of a knowledge-based society. In this approach, the knowledge and skills of workers in the labour market are considered essential components of economic development, partly in terms of increasing the education level of workers and also tackling early school leaving (ESL). This is of vital importance in making European national economies more competitive in the world economy.

ESL emerged as an important societal issue in most EU countries in the 1980s and 1990s. This significant issue has therefore been a matter of debate in policy making for more than 30 years (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2012). Reducing ESL to less than 10% by 2020 was agreed as a headline target and a key objective of the Europe 2020 strategy and one of the five benchmarks of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving [TWG], 2013).

ESL as a persistent social problem was previously defined and measured differently by European countries because the understanding of the concept depended on national educational structures and what leaving school prematurely at different stages of the education system meant in various national educational and economic contexts (e.g. before gaining a minimum qualification) (TWG, 2013). In some country contexts, other terms are used to describe similar groups of young people, such as school ‘dropouts’, ‘Early Leavers from Education and Training’ (ELET), ‘interrupted learners’, ‘push-outs’, and ‘Not in Employment, Education or Training’ (NEETs). While these terms emphasise different

features of the target group, the definitions have played a crucial role in the development of policies for preventing or reducing the share of students who do not obtain secondary qualifications (Oomen & Plant, 2014). For instance, by focussing on school dropouts, policy makers develop means of preventing dropping out. Alternatively, focussing on the number of students who have not completed upper secondary education could shift the attention to helping students re-enter and complete their education (TWG, 2013).

ESL is one of the most challenging and complex problems in education systems, mostly caused by an increase in disengagement for personal, familial, economic, social, geographical and education-related reasons (OECD, 2012). Because ESL is multifaceted, there is no single response to this issue. EU countries, therefore, employ various methods for resolving the problem. However, even the categorisation of measures can be puzzling, as there are obvious overlaps (e.g. different types of second chance provisions) (TWG, 2013). In June 2011, the Education Council of the European Union adopted a Recommendation on policies to reduce ESL<sup>1</sup>, which promotes the need for evidence-based, comprehensive policies that should be cross-sectoral in nature and also involve consultation with stakeholders in policy areas such as youth, employment, welfare and health. Additionally, the Recommendation emphasises that comprehensive strategies for reducing ESL should also address the whole education spectrum and include prevention strategies, intervention and compensation measures (TWG, 2013).

Prevention strategies and interventions explore how to avoid the circumstances in which actions that lead to ESL are rooted, and thus require strategies at a systemic level. Effective interdiction of ESL requires successful educational outcomes and the thoughtful design of education systems. An example of preventive strategies and interventions is career education,

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<sup>1</sup>Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, OJ C 191/2011 (<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:191:0001:0006:en:PDF>). Retrieved: 31/01/2017

which could play a significant role in preventing ESL (Sultana, 2012). Intervention measures (e.g. early warning systems, extra-curricular activities) address problems that arise at an early stage, attempting to prevent them from leading to ESL. All students can benefit from these intervention measures, but they are especially relevant to those at risk of ESL. In addition to preventative measures, there are compensation measures that provide dropouts with education and training opportunities. For instance, second chance provisions concentrate on re-integration into mainstream education and giving those affected the chance to obtain upper-secondary qualifications, and/or on preparing students for vocational education and training (VET) or employment (TWG, 2013).

Solutions to this problem are not only multi-faceted, but they are likely to be context specific. In the research described herein, the substantially different comprehensive strategies and policy contexts of three European countries, namely England, Denmark and Hungary, are compared and contrasted in order to map differences and similarities in their methods of combatting ESL. Measures related to career guidance are examined together with second chance provisions with different foci, as illustrated by the field sites in the three countries under investigation, presented in the context chapters (Chapters 4 and 5). The second chance provisions chosen for this research are members of a European network called the Association of European Cities and Second Chance Schools (E2C), which also means that the teaching methodology in the selected E2C educational partner organisations is substantially different from that in mainstream schools. This is especially evident in the sense that the former intensively focus on students' individual needs by employing flexible teaching methods and creating committed partnerships. According to a European survey (Day et al, 2013), second chance provisions were mostly effective when they presented a clear distinction from mainstream education. Provisions have made a conscious effort to steer clear of negative associations with initial education, while ensuring that the learning opportunities

they offer are credible. Examples of positive features include highlighting the respect that school staff show towards students, and promoting their strong association with the adult world. This approach has the potential to efficiently counter negative stereotypes about alternative schooling provisions among the general public. Of fundamental importance in re-engaging students is recognising and tracking those who have dropped out. In addition, second chance provisions have realised that developing roots in the local community and raising awareness by communicating via social networks can be considered significant in this context (Day et al, 2013; YR, 2017).

The research in this thesis suggests that ESL and its causes are not entirely educational, but the quality of the education system influences their presence. It specifically draws attention to comprehensive measures such as career guidance and second chance provisions, which help combat ESL. Moreover, it highlights the challenges of rigid education systems and discusses the potential services (e.g. second chance provisions, career guidance) that are targeted to the individual needs of students to raise productivity and performance in education and/or on the labour market.

## **1.2 Professional background**

My decision to pursue this doctoral research was strongly influenced by my commitment to understand disadvantaged youth, which has been my main field of professional and personal interest for more than 16 years. By undertaking a doctoral study on dropouts and students at risk in education, with consequences for their entry into the labour market, I have deepened and expanded my previous research giving it an international perspective.

An important source of inspiration for my current research was the experience gained at the Hungarian ‘Springboard’ (Dobbantó) programme where I worked as a project manager and young researcher (2008–2011). The project gave me a profound insight into the dropout

issues of 15 to 24-year-olds and inspiration to explore the fundamental social mechanisms pertaining. The goal of the three-year, nationwide pilot programme was to provide a springboard for early school leavers (Schmitsek, 2012). Springboard cooperated with international partner organisations such as the APS International (Centre for School Improvement) and the E2C. Through my work at the programme I gained first hand insight into the work of the E2C network, and I had the chance to get involved in the international work by representing the project at international conferences where the network shared good practices with experts on dropout issues.

In the academic year of 2012/13, I gained a scholarship that supported my stay at Aarhus University in Denmark as a visiting student, which enabled me to get a deeper insight into the Danish educational system and strategies regarding educational and social inclusion.

Malterud states that: ‘A researcher’s background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions’ (Malterud, 2001, p. 483–484). In accordance with Malterud’s statement, it can be concluded that my professional background has affected the research topic and also the focus of my investigation. However, the most influential motivation to choose the research topic came from my 16 years experience as a teacher and youth worker with young people who are at risk. Moreover, I have had a strong commitment to understanding disadvantaged youth since I left grammar school at the age of 19, joining a Hungarian youth association to help children and youngsters in different children’s homes. Professionally, I gained experience as a social worker and subsequently as a special educational needs teacher and as a speech and language therapist. This can be considered a lifelong commitment to different groups with disadvantages. Throughout my career, I have always preferred to complement my academic



activities with professional work experience in areas related to my field of interest. This strategy has also allowed me to establish rapport with research participants and to gain access to research sites.

To sum up, one of the aims of my doctoral studies has been to contribute my professional experiences from the field to the representation of my research findings, which will be addressed in the following chapters.

### **1.3 The research project**

This thesis presents results from research into the educational experiences of young people who had been at risk of dropping out or who had dropped out of secondary education in three different national contexts – Denmark, England and Hungary – and then went on to gain a qualification. They attended second chance provisions that were tailored to support the acquisition of self-efficacy, career adaptability and career management skills, which led them to continue their careers in higher education and/or in the labour market. My doctoral research is based on comparative fieldwork in three urban areas, allocated pseudonyms as follows: Øresund City (Denmark), Paprika City (Hungary) and Grey Town (England). The fieldwork was carried out over the course of 14 months in 2014 and 2015. As part of the research, I conducted observations in second chance provisions and interviewed a total of 28 former students. Access to the participant institutions was ensured via the E2C, of which I had been an active member for eight years.

By listening to the voices of former students, my analysis focusses on the relevance and importance of different sources of support with special regard to positive relationships, such as those between the mentor/teacher/tutor/career counsellor/social worker (the term depends on the country context) and the student, as well as peer support as motivators to sustain engagement in education. The thesis presents how they described their career at school, their

negative experiences in mainstream settings and their learning pathways in second chance provisions. Moreover, it presents their interpretations and narratives about the influences, which they considered important to their career in education and later in their adult life.

In addition, the interviews analysed in my doctoral research includes policy makers, teachers, school leaders, career counsellors, mentors and social workers. The interviews with these stakeholders and grass roots professionals (n = 21) are used to gain insight into the policy context of the three countries under investigation.

The issue of young people who ‘drop out’ and the circumstances of their failure to complete post-14 education has been the subject of debate for more than three decades (J. Smyth & Hattam, 2004). According to Fine (1991), there has been an active construction of what is being seen by policy makers and what, therefore, needs to be done to reduce ESL. Yet, there has been little attention paid to understanding the meaning and context of ESL. In Fine’s words, most representations demonise young people and their non-completion of schooling, and give a ‘shaved and quite partial image’ (Fine, 1991, p. 55). In order to try to give a more distinct image of dropouts/at-risk students in different contexts, I carried out a comparative qualitative research study with the aim to explore these complexities. Regarding the nature of literature of comparative studies on dropouts, there is a gap in the existing literature. Most comparative studies about youth at risk take a quantitative approach and almost exclusively focus on the relations between achievement, attainment, social background and unemployment (e.g. OECD, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2016; Dale, 2011). It is argued that there is a lack of qualitative comparative research and the question of how young people from these groups experience their career in education and/or the labour market; moreover, their opinion about the potential for improvement is rarely addressed. My research focusses on former students’ accounts in order to map the dynamic among the dropouts and their relationships,

expectations, opportunities and obstacles encountered in the three country settings studied.

Social constructionism postulates that knowledge is both situated and relative. The concept of situated and relative knowledge has shaped this research project approach, in particular, the research questions. This research approach suited my research interest in the voices of early school leavers and their understandings of success and failure in their career.

From a social constructivist stance, dropouts can be considered as social constructs and the three country contexts as social contexts that influence the terminology and understandings of 'drop-out'. Bearing this in mind, my research questions embody this perspective and emphasise the interaction between human beings, their interactions and their context:

- . How are the education and training policies (with special regard to careers guidance) that aim to reduce ESL in the three countries in the study designed?
- . What institutional alternatives are offered to at-risk students in the three countries under study?
- . What are the factors that motivate at-risk students and dropouts to stay in a supportive teaching-learning environment, and how do these impact their future career and learning pathways?

The methodology used in this research builds on the idea that the researcher should gain an empathetic view of the target group under study, as the aim is to investigate the voices of early school leavers. Qualitative methods (e.g. interviews and observations) are applied to interrogate the subjective dimension and to rely on accounts provided by individual respondents. Using a qualitative research design provides an in-depth understanding of the data.

### 1.3.1 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of eight chapters in addition to the Introduction, with the structure as follows:

*Chapter 2* is the literature review, which sets out the theoretical foundations of my empirical research on the problems and issues related to early school leaving. The approach taken is reflective and critical, documenting an intellectual journey concerned with exploring relevant conceptual tools and theoretical frames that could potentially be used to organise and interpret the empirical material arising from my fieldwork.

ESL, educational inequality, comprehensive measures against ESL, including lifelong career guidance and second chance provisions, have been examined within the social sciences. In this chapter I have grouped this broad field of research into four main strands. These are discussed, showing how they have inspired the research and formed the background for the analysis, and how they present a number of gaps, which will be addressed in subsequent chapters. The first strand consists of research that takes its point of departure from social constructionism, which acts as an overarching theory throughout the literature review. It seems reasonable to apply social constructionism as an overarching theory because it postulates that knowledge is both situated and relative, which helps explore the situation of young people in different policy contexts. The second strand examines how the concept of ESL is constructed in different contexts. The third strand looks at how young people's positions are constructed as a result of social interactions and networks using the concept of social representations (Breakwell, 1992, 2010; Howarth, 2002, 2006) and peer social capital (Coleman, 1988; Jørgensen, 2011, 2017; Putnam, 2004). The fourth strand includes issues of career construction focussing on Savickas' (2013) career construction theory, and career adaptability (Bimrose, Barnes, Brown, & Hughes, 2011).

**Chapter 3** describes the methodology I used, which builds on ideas that an empathetic view should be gained of the group under study, as the aim of my PhD research is to investigate the voices of early school leavers. In order to perceive a subjective dimension, and to follow the constructionist paradigm, I applied qualitative research methods. In this chapter six main topics are reviewed, showing the empirical and practical background for the data analysis. Firstly, the qualitative research design is introduced focussing on why I conducted qualitative (semi-structured) interviews with young people, teachers, career practitioners, social workers and policy makers. Secondly, grounded theory is examined describing the main strands and characteristics. Thirdly, the main features of theoretical sampling and the challenges faced at the three fieldwork sites are discussed. Fourthly, the circumstances of context familiarisation and observation, moreover, the detailed process of interviewing are explained. Fifthly, the data analysis using grounded theory is introduced, which has three main stages: the continuing discovery of emerging themes which guides further data collection; the coding of data and creation of categories; and finally, the contextualisation of findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Last, the researcher's role and reflexivity are discussed.

**Chapter 4** primarily describes results from research into: the policies and measures related to ESL, and the different support and education systems, including career education and career guidance and counselling in the three different national contexts – Denmark, England and Hungary. By getting a deeper insight into the given country's measures to combat ESL, how different political contexts and discourses influence young people's careers and future perspectives can be better understood. In order to describe different policy contexts, I used interviews conducted with experts – teachers, career practitioners, social workers and policy makers (n= 21).

**Chapter 5** describes the main characteristics of each country context emphasising the

significant differences and similarities found regarding the function and role of each second chance provision. In addition, different grass routes professionals' points of view in each local context are introduced in order to describe how different sources of support influence young people's careers. The rationale behind sampling three European cities was to compare and contrast substantially different support systems and local strategies to draw attention to successful institutional answers (e.g. the role of career guidance and counselling, of flexible routes in the given education system, of cross-sectoral cooperation) while combating ESL.

As ESL is a complex problem influenced by the cumulative processes of disengagement, a variety of comprehensive measures plays an important role in these European cities in order to enhance the integration of young people into the education system, and into the labour market.

The subsequent three Chapters (6, 7 and 8) present and analyse the data collected in the three countries under investigation. The data comprise 28 interviews conducted with former students of different second chance provisions aged 23 to 40, and observations in the three research field sites. These students had dropped out or had been at risk in mainstream education. However, due to second chance provisions, they returned to education and then entered the labour market because they had gained self-efficacy, career-adaptability and transferable skills enabling them to become self-sufficient in their future careers. These three chapters directly answer the main research question – *What are the factors that motivate at-risk students and dropouts to stay in a supportive teaching-learning environment, and how do these impact their future career and learning pathways?* – set out in Chapter 3.

**Chapter 6** describes young people's negative experiences of school and family and the influences they identified as affecting their feelings of disengagement, which resulted in them leaving mainstream education. This chapter describes causes and experiences, which led

young people to an alternative pathway. Young people experience schooling in a number of ways, and the factors, which influence their experiences, are complex and multi-faceted. Despite this variety, there are a number of general themes and commonalities across the narratives. The first part of the chapter describes the negative experiences young people faced in mainstream education, which was the main factor contributing to their loss in confidence. The second part introduces family related issues, which influenced young people's well-being and confidence causing a number of problems at the individual level including addiction, eating disorders, depression and identity issues.

**Chapter 7** explores young people's positive experiences of second chance provisions and analyses different processes and agents that helped transform students' negative thoughts about school experience to a friendly and steady cooperation between students and teachers. The chapter argues that second chance provisions are unique and, despite being in different policy contexts, that they have similar features, such as open/flexible and secure environments, tolerant/diverse and egalitarian cultures, diverse teaching methods and cultivate peer-to-peer support. In addition, the most successful characteristics and nature of second chance education are highlighted: most importantly, the qualities and characteristics of the teachers, counsellors and mentors; flexible pedagogic methods applied in a diverse learning environment; and the role of peers in the second chance community. In the closing section of this chapter, the impact of second chance education are described, for example how students are motivated and inspired to work efficiently as a team, engage in egalitarian communication, and the possibility of gaining a qualification.

**Chapter 8** outlines and analyses young people's perspectives on the different influences they believed to have affected their future careers, and also the concerns they expressed about how society should treat young people in order to make them feel engaged. First, the role of career

education and guidance applied in second chance provisions is introduced as an important factor to helping young people find a career pathway after second chance. Second, the former students' accounts are introduced on how they experienced education and/or the world of work after different second chance provisions in the three countries under investigation applying the framework of career adaptability. Finally, the third theme introduces former students' critical voices called 'Criticism of society'. These emphasise the importance of second chance provisions in the given country and the significance of the role of policy making and of possible institutional solutions in combating ESL.

*Chapter 9* summarises the main research findings and presents conclusions and recommendations based on three contrasting policy contexts and education systems, including career guidance and second chance provisions. These findings are derived from interviews with experts and professionals from the field, moreover from the educational experiences of young people who were at risk of dropping out and/or who had dropped out of secondary education in Denmark, England and Hungary, and then gained a qualification. Former students attended second chance provisions that were different from the mainstream because they were designed to support the acquisition of self-efficacy, career adaptability and career management skills, which enabled them to find their career trajectories into higher education and/or in the labour market.

While drawing out conclusions from the research findings the three countries' policy contexts and the characteristics of their institutional answers to combat ESL have been considered in order to shape relevant policy recommendations.



## **Chapter 2 Literature review**

This chapter reviews the theoretical foundations of my empirical research into problems and issues related to early school leaving (ESL). The chapter documents an intellectual exploration of the relevant conceptual tools and theoretical frames that can be used to organise and interpret the empirical material that arises from the phase of fieldwork.

ESL, educational inequality, and comprehensive measures against ESL, including lifelong/career guidance and second chance provisions, have been approached in social science from several different perspectives. In this chapter, this broad field of research is categorised into four main strands. These are reviewed and discussed, showing how they shaped the background for the analysis, and where knowledge gaps exist – which are addressed in subsequent chapters. The first strand consists of research that takes its point of departure from social constructionism (Crotty, 2012; Leeds & Hurwitz, 2009), whose core argument is that knowledge is relative. This approach was the overarching framework for the exploration of the perspectives of young people in second chance provisions in different policy contexts. The second strand examines how the concept of ESL is constructed in different contexts (Blaug, 2001; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012; RESL, 2015). The third addresses how young people's positions are constructed as a result of social interactions and networks using the concept of social representations (Breakwell, 1983, 2010; Howarth, 2002, 2006), McMahon's Theory Systems Framework (McMahon, 2002; Patton & McMahon, 1995, 1999, 2006) and peer social capital (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2004). Finally, the fourth strand integrates relevant concepts from career construction, focussing on Savickas's (2013) career construction theory, and career adaptability (Bimrose et al., 2011).

## **2.1 Social constructionism**

Social constructionism as a theoretical strand of the social sciences has developed a particular position as regards how social reality is understood. It acknowledges that the understanding, significance and construction of meaning must arise exclusively within the individual and in the context of social interaction with other human beings (Leeds & Hurwitz, 2009). Therefore, social constructionism focusses on the analysis of discourse and language and how these function in relationships with others (Stead, 2013). At the centre of the theory is the premise that individuals justify their experience by constructing an imitation of the social world and its operation (Leeds & Hurwitz, 2009). According to Stead (2013), social constructionism is concerned with the narratives of people in context, rather than providing grand narratives in a search for universals. In so doing, it is well positioned to provide useful knowledge that increases understanding of the everyday circumstances of marginalised people and communities, such as the poor, the oppressed, those discriminated against, and those whose lifestyles are not representative of the norm. It is an approach that challenges one to think differently, and to imagine situations as they may be (Stead, 2013).

Since the present research has focussed on the voices of early school leavers themselves, and explores the perceptions of educational success and failure, which have influenced their careers in the education system and in the labour market in three distinctive country contexts, social constructionism is an appropriate overarching theory. In particular, this paradigm's understanding is that 'truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities of our world' (Crotty, 2012, p. 8), and the concepts of situated and relative knowledge were the main points of reference of the analysis.

Social constructionism is grounded in many disciplines – for example, social psychology, social history, existential-phenomenological psychology and hermeneutics (Holstein & Miller, 1993). A number of its main themes emerged from diverse influential writings such as those of Giambattista Vico, Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx and Garfunkel (Billig, 1991). Within the context of social theory there is broad consensus that social constructionism first came about during the 1980s and developed in the 1990s (Hacking, 2000). The schools of the history of ideas and the sociology of knowledge have also been greatly inspired by social constructionism.

Social constructionism, particularly the situated and relative theoretical strands, provide a point of reference in the description of diverse country-related contents such as different policy and institutional contexts, in addition to the terms related to ESL and career guidance that are used in the countries under investigation.

Bourdieu argued that '[t]o think in terms of field is to think relationally' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 96). In other words, we should take into account how individuals and groups are engaged in the construction of their perceived social reality. It follows that examining country-related measures and strategies from different perspectives for tackling ESL involves thinking about the inter-relationships among the policy context, the education system, individual schools, the local institutional responses to drop-out issues, as well as the relations between individuals in the given local situation. For instance, the three country contexts under investigation reflect different political philosophies. English and Hungarian measures and practices of combating ESL are inspired – to various extents – by neo-liberal approaches; that is, the responsibility of individuals is implied. Ball (2008, p.25) calls this 'responsibilisation' of social issues, which means that functions and responsibilities that were formerly considered the responsibility of institutions and collectives are instead delegated to

the individual. Ball argues that such policy neo-liberalises us: ‘... by making us enterprising and responsible, by offering us the opportunity to succeed, and by making us guilty if we do not’ (Ball, 2012, p.145). In contrast, Danish policies and measures related to ESL are inspired by the Nordic welfare model, which is based on a very significant role for the state in welfare arrangements. In this model, the principle of universal social rights applies to the entire population, therefore there are committed partnerships between individuals and institutions in terms of responsibility sharing (Alestalo et al., 2009).

As mentioned above, the terms related to ESL and career guidance used in the countries participating in this research are situated and relative. The 2004 EU resolution on ESL determined how guidance counsellors should help young people socially integrate, where active social participation is based on work and education. Accordingly, from the perspective of social policy, career guidance can be regarded as a soft governance mechanism, since people choose a field that meets their own and society’s – or more precisely, the labour market’s – interests through a process of guidance (Plant & Thomsen, 2011). However, this mechanism offers fewer alternatives and clearly demonstrates the role of social control that is present in legislative initiatives, such as in the Danish Youth Action Programme 2010 (for more detail, see Chapter 4) (Plant, 2010).

For instance, the Danish term for counselling is ‘vejledning’ (*leading someone on the way*). It covers personal counselling, school counselling, educational and vocational guidance and counselling, career guidance and development and supervision of students during their college and university studies (Plant & Thomsen, 2011).

In the English context – unlike in many countries – a clear distinction is made between counselling and career counselling for young people. The first focusses on personal issues, whereas the second mainly concentrates on the world of work (Bimrose & Hughes, 2013).

So, ‘the primary purpose of career counselling is to support individual transitions related to the world of work throughout of the life course’ (p. 184).

In the Hungarian context, the term ‘career counselling’ has never been clearly defined since there exists neither a universal regulatory-legal framework, nor any universal nomenclature, nor any universal professional standards related to career counselling. Therefore, there is no agreement about the differences of meaning reflected in different settings (for example, in institutes of public education, educational advisory centres, job centres, non-profit organisations, higher education institutes, health system institutes and market players) (Borbély-Pecze, 2010).

In summary, social constructionism helps with understanding the dynamics of constructed social realities. More precisely, it can highlight how distinctive policy contexts determine citizens’ lives and how identical terms are defined differently in the countries under consideration. Thus, the social constructionist paradigm helps with reflection about the rationale of this research, which is to compare and contrast essentially distinct national strategies and support systems with a view to drawing attention to policies and successful institutional responses to combating ESL (e.g. the role of career guidance and counselling, and flexible routes in the given education system) – in Denmark, England and Hungary.

## **2.2 The construction of ESL**

Social constructionism has important implications for the concept of ESL. As discussed above, social constructionism centres on the suggestion that human beings rationalise their experience by creating models of the social world, which they share through language. Accordingly, it is important to see that ESL, the main focus of this research, can only be

interpreted as a discursive construction; namely, it is shaped in parallel with the power games that are in play between public discourse and policy discourse. Thus, the meaning and boundaries of ESL in a given context are defined by the struggle of political interest-groups (RESL, 2015).

Specifically from a constructivist perspective, ‘dropouts’ can be considered social constructs and the three-country contexts (England, Denmark and Hungary) the social contexts which each influence the terminology and understandings of ‘dropout’ and ‘ESL’. This has substantial policy implications regarding how the social issue of ESL is tackled.

To understand and recognise the underlying approach of the phenomenon, the different terms that have been used to define this experience in the last twenty to thirty years must be examined, during which time the dropping out of students has been regarded as one of the major problems of education systems (OECD, 2012).

Dropout was the first term widely used in the literature and in policies to become associated with school failure and poor qualifications. Dropping out from education can take place at any time and can be experienced by different age groups (TWG, 2013). The term is still an important one, but it is less well acknowledged by experts than ESL as its meaning is contextual, relative and does not describe individual or social effects (e.g. integration into the labour market or society). Therefore, indicators of dropout are neither easily measurable nor comparable; they rather indicate trends and approximate proportions (Mártonfi, 2014).

To measure the phenomenon more accurately, new terms have come into use which are compatible with social integration, such as ESL (Mártonfi, 2014). The European Commission recently distinguished ESL/Early Leavers from Education and Training (ELET) from school dropouts, and as these terms are defined slightly differently, they capture some related concepts of what the problem and possible solutions might be. In this regard, early school

leavers are those 18–24-year-olds who have finished only lower secondary education or less (ISCED 0, 1, 2 or 3c for short) and who did not attend education or training during the four weeks prior to the survey (EC, 2013). This category is quite exact, so it is widely used in comparative assessments conducted by supranational agencies (e.g. Eurostat) (TWG, 2013).

The other term – mostly used by the OECD – is Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET). This concept is more complex than the previous category as it indicates a failure to integrate into the labour market. This indicator estimates the proportion of young people whose transfer from education to the world of work involves difficulties, or will never happen (TWG, 2013). There is a large proportion of early school leavers in the NEET cohort, as well as young people with secondary or higher education qualifications who are unemployed. Thus, this category is wider than ESL in terms of both its target group and age group, as the OECD reports NEET indicators for the 15–19, 20–24 and 25–29 age groups (Mártonfi, 2014).

There are other indicators for capturing young people's lack of success in the labour market which explore this phenomenon from different angles with a view to enabling efficient policies to be developed that can respond to the actual problems. One of them is the dropout indicator, which signifies the amount of students who enter an educational programme and then drop out at some point without gaining a qualification (Fehérvári, 2015). This is mostly country-context dependent, as there are education systems where students can easily transfer from one flexible type of programme to another, and others in which these multiple transitions can be challenging. To address this problem some countries (e.g. Hungary and Denmark) track their students' educational careers in a database in which each student is given an educational identifier (Mártonfi, 2014).

Besides the different attempts to specify the scope of the phenomenon under discussion, the approach to explaining the origin of ESL can also result in different models. The related literature suggests that there are three ways to understand and explain the causes of ESL.

First, the deficit model addresses students who drop out of education before or as soon as they are legally entitled to. This approach identifies the young individuals as the source of the problem: 'the term drop-out clearly places the blame for non-completion on the student ... the very use of either term already implies a difference in the remedies that will be adopted to tackle the problem of early school leavers' (Blaug, 2001, p. 27). Factors contributing to the decision to drop out in this approach might comprise under-achievement due to poor academic grades and poor self-esteem (NESF, 2001).

Second, the 'push-out' model criticises the institutional structure of the school. In this approach, the supporting components of the problem comprise the curriculum, school type, the disciplinary procedures applied at school, and student-teacher interactions. In practice, both the first and second models can be integrated, so that students who leave school early can be considered both to have dropped out and been pushed-out in what can be defined 'a mutual process of rejection' (Blaug, 2001, p. 29). This can result in students' constant absences from school, which then become unable to handle these individuals who appear to be unmotivated. In addition, combined individual and institutional factors can result in estrangement from school. These may include drug misuse or addiction and/or family problems (NESF, 2001).

Third, the 'rational' choice model relates to the costs of continuing participation (Erikson & Jonsson, 1996; Goldthorpe, 1996; Smyth, 1999). Students may consider ESL to be a rational choice, a valid alternative that avoids the need to shoulder the further costs of schooling. Where the unemployment rate is high, young people and their parents may not realise much



advantage to continue schooling and may opt instead for poorly paid work that is immediately available (NESF, 2001).

These models emphasise the multi-causality and the multifaceted nature of ESL. It will be shown later how these scientific conceptualisations influence national policy documents, the way the policy problem is framed, and how adequate responses are defined.

As well as registering indicators of educational failure, data on youth employment and unemployment provide policy makers with relevant information about the proportion of young adults who are liable to be pushed to the periphery of society. The role of these indicators has been of major importance in estimating these young people's chances of integrating into the labour market and society. Societies should recognise that they have an interest in improving these indicators, because in countries such as Denmark where the rate of youth unemployment is relatively low (11.6% in 2015) young people have more opportunities and better future perspectives in the labour market.

### **2.2.1 ESL as a relative concept in different country contexts**

As indicated above, even though each of the countries under investigation deals with a similar target group, different terminology is used to define the phenomenon.

In Denmark, a number of terms such as drop-outs (in Danish: *unge, der falder fra en eller flere ungdomsuddannelser*), 'push-outs', or more recently, early school leavers (in Danish: *unge, der forlader grundskolen med eller uden prøver og ikke får yderligere uddannelse*) are widespread, but most commonly the national definition (*eksluderende*) is used, whose meaning is closer to 'push-outs'. The terms dropout and ESL are not often translated into Danish, since researchers typically write their papers in English. Danish researchers often

link the term dropout to pushout, highlighting the socially excluding mechanisms of the education system (Plant, 2014). The term ‘push-out’ has increased the growing recognition that cross-sectorial cooperation can play an important role in tackling ESL, implying that ESL is caused by societal and educational malfunctioning rather than individual problems and students’ family background or peers (Nevala & Hawley, 2011). In addition, this term also integrates the philosophy of the Nordic welfare model, where responsibilities are shared between individuals and institutions, and welfare arrangements are broadly supported by the state. Jensen argues that subcategories can be identified in the Danish target group: the isolated, the repressed, the self-assured, and the well-adjusted (Jensen, 2010). These terms refer to young people between the ages of 15 and 24 who are in need of intensified career guidance efforts (Plant, 2010).

In England, ESL is not discussed in English government policy. Instead, early leavers from education and training in England are classified as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and Not in Education or Training (NET). NEET/NET data is mostly collected for the age group 16–24. Various subcategories of NEETs are sometimes used, such as ‘Open to learning’ NEETs, ‘Sustained’ NEETs and ‘Undecided’ NEETs. Other subcategories include ‘Out of Scope’ NEETs ‘Identifiable Barrier’ NEETs and ‘No Identifiable Barrier’ NEETs (Nelson & O’Donnell, 2012). As discussed above, this category covers a wider target group than ESL and can be a source of confusion as it also includes those young people who voluntarily decide not to enter the labour market after obtaining a secondary or higher education qualification.

In Hungary, two terms are used in the professional discourse that are similar to drop-out (lemerzsolódás) and, lately, ESL (korai iskolaelhagyás). Recently, the target group under study has been classified as early school leavers because of the adoption of the Eurostat

definition which covers 18–24-year-olds with only a lower secondary education or less who are not in education and training (RESL, 2015).

The terms used in England and Hungary to describe early school leavers imply the responsibility of individuals, the sub-text being that if you do not manage to navigate your career in times of social difficulties, you as an individual are responsible (Sultana, 2012). However, issues linked to individuals' interactions with the labour market can equally be considered structural problems on the demand side; therefore they require structural solutions (Watts, 1996).

The terms of reference I use in my research approach to ESL differ slightly from the official EUROSTAT definitions because my intention – similarly to previous research into ESL (Ivan&Rostas, 2013) – was to analyse the phenomenon of non-participation in education of various extent by students who have the opportunity to re-enrol in the education system after some time in three different country contexts. The young people under consideration belonged to different age groups when they dropped out of school; for instance, a number of Hungarian students dropped out first at the age of 14 after enrolling in secondary education. As a result, the extent of this research goes beyond ESL according to the standard definition (i.e. 18–24-year-olds) in order to broaden the meaning to include school dropouts more generally. In any case, the notions ESL and dropout are related, but the significant distinction between the two phenomena is that someone who has dropped out of education is not necessarily an early school leaver (Ivan&Rostas, 2013). In addition, the term 'at-risk student' is also applied in my research to describe those Danish students who were at risk of dropping out of comprehensive school, but due to the preventative approach of the Danish system were supported by a guidance counsellor and engaged in second chance provision instead of dropping out altogether.

Leaving school early has been defined differently, which situation is due to the policy and public discourse of the given context. It is essential to consider how policy makers and experts define ESL because this has a significant impact on the efficiency of the interventions applied to combat ESL and on understanding its extent (Ivan&Rostas, 2013). ESL indicators should be carefully considered when developing effective policies for supporting education systems and the labour market. Effective policy contexts should provide a number of structural solutions to young people in order to keep them engaged, which is a more cost-effective approach for societies in the long run than abandoning young people in a state of uncertainty.

### **2.2.2 Causes of ESL and comprehensive solutions**

Depending on one's perceptions, ESL can be caused by individual or system failure, or a combination of the two. A number of studies (Dale, 2011; RESL, 2015; Ivan&Rostas, 2013; TWG, 2013) argue that ESL mostly occurs due to an ever-intensifying process of disengagement, caused by personal, familial, social, economic, geographical, and education-related matters which may be external or internal to school experiences, and particularly specific to the individual. According to Audas and Willms (2001) there are six characteristics of ESL:

First, individual effects can be identified among each person's distinguishing characteristics, such as academic efficiency, engagement in schooling and health issues. According to the related literature (Audas & Willms, 2001; Ivan&Rostas, 2013; Traag & Van Der Velden, 2006; TWG, 2013) boys are more likely to encounter ESL, hinting at the diverse process of socialisation and the development of gender-specific characteristics. Additionally, these

studies confirm that children who show aggressive behaviour during early school years will potentially end up leaving the system earlier.

Second, another significant factor is cognitive ability related to personal characteristics; moreover, characteristics inherited from parents, family environment and the quality of ECEC (Cunha&Heckman, 2009a, 2009b; Doyle et al., 2013; Elango et al., 2016; Esping-Andersen, 2004; Garcia et al., 2016; Heckman&Raut,2016; Heckman &Masterov, 2007).

Third, family effects have various components, like the family's socio-economic status (SES), household structure, parenting methods and parental participation in both school and social capital (Audas & Willms, 2001). The family plays an influential role in helping youth avoid ESL as family characteristics are fundamental to determining whether a student will be successful at school and in society (Dale, 2011; RESL, 2015; Ivan&Rostas., 2012; TWG, 2013). A number of research findings (Coleman, 1988; Esping-Andersen, 2004; Traag & Van Der Velden, 2006) support the claim that family capital can take three distinct forms: financial capital, human capital and social capital. The financial capital factors that may lead to ESL are low SES and precarious family structures (divorce, single-parent families or large families). These are often associated with the level of education among family members as a significant factor in students' school careers (Audas & Willms, 2001). However, every country in the world has different schema regarding the connection between the parents' status and school performance. For instance, it is very likely that a child from a family with low SES would have a more promising educational career in the equality-based Danish welfare-state than in Hungary with its selective society.

Fourth, peer effects are associated with the environment and the networks of friends. The network of friends of adolescents is a significant point of reference in building up the latter's self-esteem, values and rules as they adapt to their reference group (Audas & Willms, 2001).

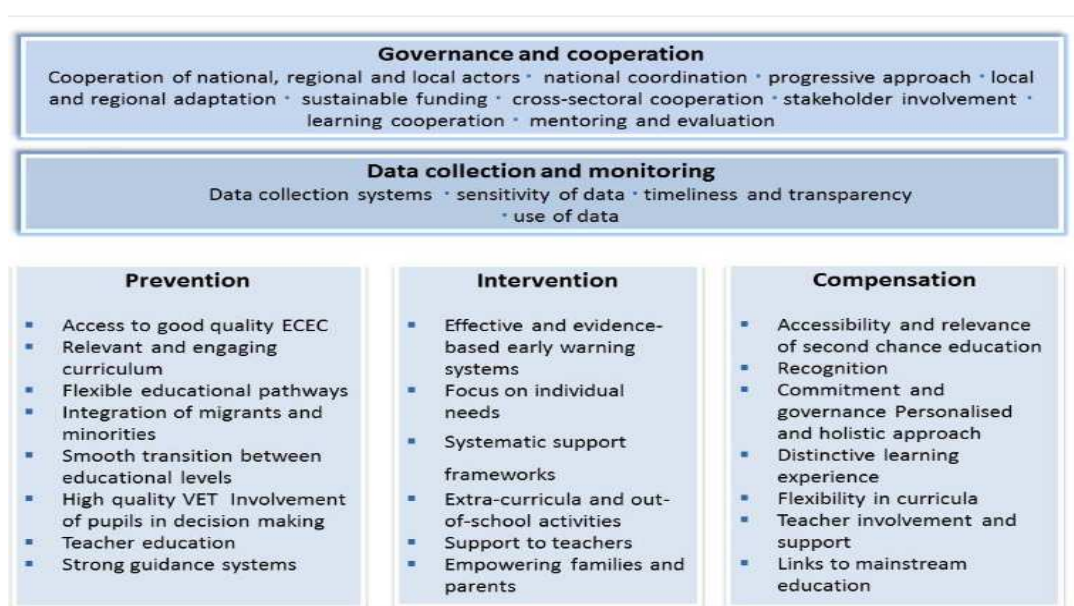
Research into ESL shows that students with early school leaving friends are more likely to end up in the same situation (Ellenbogen & Chamberland, 1997; Smyth & Hattam, 2004).

Fifth, school effects are mentioned in a number of comparative studies (OECD, 2012; TWG, 2013; RESL, 2015) which also examine the quality of teaching, including the characteristics of teachers, teachers' commitment, applied methods and assets, the size of the school, efficiency and equity in education, and moreover, the teaching-learning environment (Ivan&Rostas, 2013).

Sixth, community effects can be defined as the extensive effects of the social, economic and historical features of students' networks and communities (Ivan&Rostas, 2013). Additionally, we should take into consideration the role of local labour market conditions as these can contribute to ESL (Audas & Willms, 2001; Ivan&Rostas, 2013).

In summary, ESL is a multifaceted phenomenon with multiple causes, which can be influenced by the aforementioned effects in different combinations, and to various extents. In my research I examine how the different factors which raise the risk of ESL occur in three distinctive country contexts by analysing the narrative accounts of former students, interviews with stakeholders, observations in the three research sites and related policy documents. The identification of significant effects is essential for informing effective policies, institutional responses and policies to ESL. In the last 20 years, ESL has been of growing policy concern because of the negative social effects of young people leaving school without qualifications such as youth unemployment and growing levels of criminal activity (TWG, 2013). Owing to the fact that ESL is multifaceted, there can be no single response to this challenge. Different strategic-level responses can be identified in Europe. First, there is an overarching framework for ESL, which assembles key stakeholders and programmes under one policy. Second, ESL is part of a broad policy framework; i.e. lifelong learning

policy. Third, ESL may be addressed through numerous different policies and programmes, or in the absence of explicit policies or objectives (OECD, 2012). According to EU policies, comprehensive strategies should be introduced and implemented to reduce ESL that must focus on the whole spectrum of education and include prevention, intervention and compensation measures (OECD, 2012). Figure 2.1, below, summarises these comprehensive measures:



**Figure 2.1: Aspects of comprehensive strategies in ESL**

(EC, Commission Staff Working Paper, 2011, p. 13)

As can be seen, prevention involves processes that help avoid ESL and requires systemic initiatives. These system-level responses focus on different characteristics of the education system, which support the at-risk population to complete upper secondary education. For instance: access to good quality early childhood education and care (ECEC); flexible educational pathways; initial and continuous in-service training for educational staff; and whole school approaches (TWG, 2013). Intervention explores significant problems at an early level and tries to avoid them contributing to ESL. Many intervention measures apply to

all students and are mostly student-focussed, but are specifically relevant to the at-risk population. Some of these measures include Early Warning Systems (EWS), which include various methods of identifying and reacting to early signs of ESL, and extra-curricular and out-of-school activities. Compensation measures provide students who have dropped out/interrupted their education with flexible educational pathways to re-engage them. For example, individually tailored vocational education programmes or second chance provisions that apply a person-centred and holistic approach, though provisions can vary in their orientation and focus (TWG, 2013).

Accordingly, the literature suggests that while the root cause of ESL is not entirely educational, the quality of schooling has a strong effect on its occurrence. It follows that the quality of education should be improved at the institutional and system level to diminish the risk of dropping-out. It is advisable to implement education and training policies that create conditions for successful learning for all.

In reviewing the research into ESL, a number of gaps have been identified, which will be explored and addressed in the following sections.

### **2.2.3 Methods to study ESL/Gaps in the literature**

First, previous studies have often emphasised the role of education, including ECEC, as being important to empowerment and socio-economic well-being (Coleman et al., 1982; Cunha&Heckman, 2009a, 2009b; Heckman&Raut, 2016; Heckman &Masterov, 2007; Leonard, 2005; Dale, 2011; OECD, 2010, 2012) and have highlighted the significant relationship that exists between low socio-economic background and students at risk of reduced access to good quality services and educational failure. Cross-country comparative



research has the potential to shed light on the complexities of these phenomena in different contexts. According to the literature, there is a gap in this regard because most comparative studies about youth at risk take a quantitative approach and focus mostly on the statistical relationships between achievement, attainment, background and unemployment (e.g. Dale, 2011; OECD, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2016). Second, there exist national longitudinal studies (Fleck & Rughiniş, 2008; Hajdu et al., 2014; Mártonfi, 2014; Rumberger, 1983) that have examined school truancy based on representative data. These studies have identified the number of at-risk students, and the number of those who have already left the system. Moreover, there are some other quantitative studies about ESL (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Heckman & Raut, 2016; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000) that have developed multilevel statistical models to identify different effects at the individual and school level.

Third, qualitative research into ESL (Fine, 1991; Katznelson et al., 2016; Pless et al., 2015; Tanner et al., 1995) has used in-depth interviews or focus groups to shed light on students' participation, motivations and values. Even though a number of studies (Cedefop, 2015; OECD, 2012; Dale, 2011; TWG, 2013) highlight the importance of listening to the voices of early school leavers/young people, there is a scarcity of publications in which early school leavers' voices are expressed. One of the most significant books – in the present author's opinion, the most inspiring about this topic – is by Smyth and Hattam, entitled *'Dropping out', drifting off, being excluded: Becoming somebody without school* (Smyth & Hattam, 2004). This work reports on and analyses interviews with 200 young people who left school early or were 'at risk' of doing so in South Australia. Attention is drawn to a minority of innovative teachers who made the process of teaching and learning meaningful for some of these young people, partly by ignoring old fashioned curricula because they realised that conservative schooling practices cannot help young people who are especially at-risk to become independent and enter the world of work. The study reveals how young people

interact with popular culture, labour market processes, credentialing, peers and families as they progress to upper-secondary education. Last, they suggest constructive ways of dealing with young people that can help overcome passivity and alienation to make students feel appreciated, and above all, to make them more autonomous and well-prepared for the adult world.

Thus while some qualitative research has been undertaken, there is a lack of comparative qualitative research that has addressed the issue of how young people from different contexts experience their careers in education and/or the labour market. Moreover, young people's opinions about options for improvement are rarely addressed. My research focusses on former students' accounts and enables mapping of the dynamics that exist among the dropouts and their relationships, expectations, opportunities and obstacles that are encountered in three country settings. A key aim of the present research is to contribute to the qualitative literature about early school leavers by introducing young people's voices from three different countries.

### **2.3 How are young people's positions constructed?**

This research focusses on the relevance and importance of personal support, with special regard to positive relationships, such as adult-student, and peer support and friendship, as sources of motivation for attending school. Hence, the aim in this section is to offer deeper insight into social relations and how they construct the position and identity of individuals in their environment; moreover, to shed light on how social relations are shaped by social context and to highlight how social constructionism relates to this context.

The impact of social relations between people (including how people position themselves and how others position them in different networks) has led to notable work in social research (Breakwell, 1992, 2010; Goffman, 1959, 1963; Howarth, 2002, 2006; Moscovici, 1972,

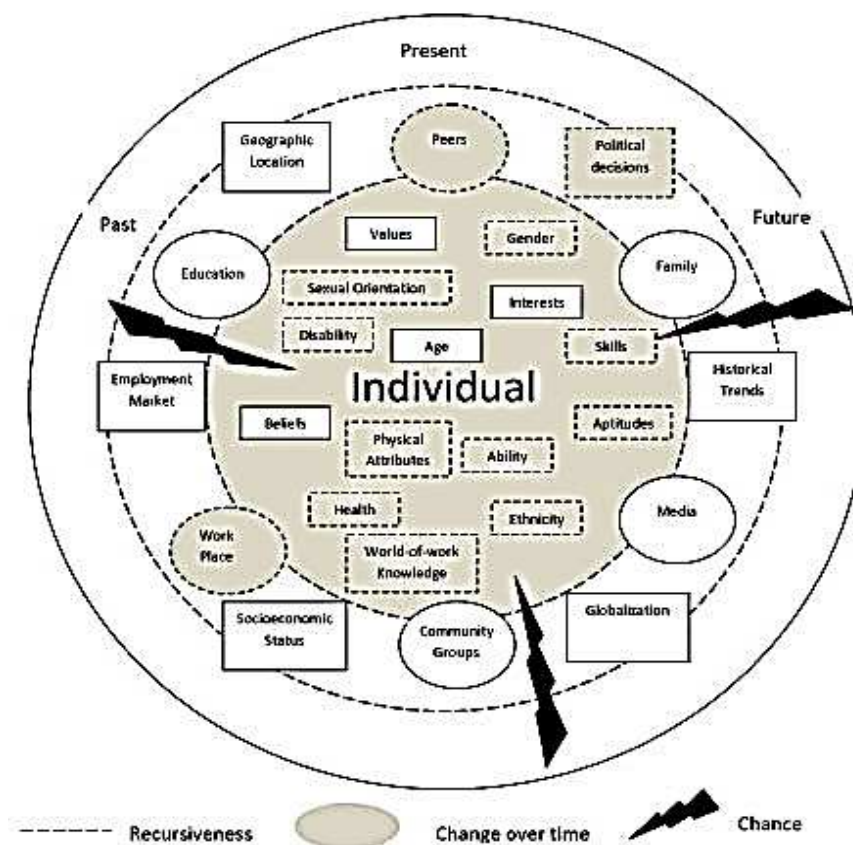
1984). The theory of social representation draws attention to contemporary social problems such as gender identities (Duveen, 2000) and racialised differences in the context of school exclusion (Howarth, 2002; 2004). The theory was derived from social constructionism and symbolic interactionism. Moscovici (1961) originally defined the term and wrote a study on the reception and dissemination of psychoanalysis in France. The theory defines the joint development 'of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating' (Moscivici, 1984, p. 12). Applying social representation theory to research can help with understanding the structures and processes that maintain uneven social patterns and inequalities (Howarth, 2006). Social representations can be explained through both the process and result of social construction. For instance, Howarth's research on school exclusion (Howarth, 2004) pointed out how being labelled a 'troublesome black youth' restricted the potential of young black pupils at school. In this study it was recognised and described how these representations are institutionalised within real and hidden curricula – that is, the ways in which particular knowledge systems become legitimised in education were identified, and how representations inform the realities they experience. Accordingly, representations can be considered vivid and dynamic – and only exist in the coherent encounters we create through dialogue and negotiation with others (Howarth, 2006). Therefore, it can be argued that a representation can be 'used for acting in the world and on others' (Jodelet, 1991, p. 44) as well as for reacting, rejecting or reforming a presentation of the world that contradicts one's position and self-identity (Howarth, 2006).

Breakwell's Identity Process Theory (IPT) employed social representation theory to understand the progression of identity (Breakwell, 2010). Breakwell introduced the idea that 'the individual's identity is a dynamic social product of the interaction of the capacities for memory, consciousness and organised construal with the physical and societal structures and influence processes which constitute the social context' (Breakwell, 2010, p. 3). IPT suggests

that identity exists in psychological processes and is manifested in conception, action and affection. Identity can be depicted through both its structure and processes. Breakwell (1983) states that comprehension of the processes that drive identity development and expression is obtained through understanding how individuals react if their identity is threatened. Identity is threatened when assimilation or accommodation are unable to satisfy demands for continuity, distinctiveness, self-efficacy and self-esteem. To avoid these threats, the individual will likely revive the function of identity processes (Breakwell, 1983, 2010). Breakwell's theory can thus help with investigating how young people's processes of assimilation/accommodation are influenced in different contexts, and how individuals are able (unable) to accommodate to new circumstances.

Regarding the fact that social constructionism has important implications for the interpretation of our social reality, multiple factors should be considered when mapping young people's social relations with their environment. Social constructionism recognises that understanding, significance and meaning-making are developed within the individual and in the context of social interaction with other human beings (Leeds & Hurwitz, 2009). It therefore emphasises discourse and language, and how these function in relationships with others to generate knowledge (Stead, 2013). A number of approaches have been applied to represent the complexity of communication and interaction that occur within the individual and with their environment. One of them is Systems Theory Framework (STF), which is particularly relevant to the present research as it allows the researcher to explore complex, multifarious issues in human behaviour. Applying STF means viewing individuals in the context of their lives (McMahon, 1995). Since the first publication about this theory in the form of a contextual framework for analysing adolescents' career decision-making (McMahon, 2005), the practical utility of STF has been clearly evident. McMahon (2002) argues that the many factors that affect vocational development are interdependent and

interactive. She also argues that STF provides a map for exploring a complex web of relationships and interactions and identifying critical influences and tensions in the lives of individuals. STF accentuates the significance of a series of intrapersonal influences on professional growth, such as personality, ability, gender and sexual orientation. Further, it argues that personal systems are attached to the social systems of individuals, in addition to the extensive environmental/societal system. Other factors such as geographical location and political stance are also identified which might influence career development significantly (Patton & McMahon, 1999). STF presents career development as a dynamic process, represented through its process influences and changes in recursiveness over time, and in terms of chance (see Figure 2.2).



**Figure 2. 2: The Systems Theory Framework of Career Development**

(from Patton & McMahon, 1999)

All systems in STF are open systems that are subject to external influence, but which may also affect the latter beyond their boundaries. This kind of interaction is called recursiveness, which in diagrammatic form is illustrated by the broken lines that represent the permeability of the boundaries of each system. It is well acknowledged that influences on an individual may change over time. The final process, chance, is illustrated on the STF diagram as lightning flashes, referring to the role of chance in career development. All of the systems of influence are located within the context of time – past, present and future –, and are connected, as the past influences the present, and together past and present influence the future (Patton & McMahon, 1999). Considering the complex and multi-faceted nature of ESL, applying STF with its holistic approach as a point of reference is considered appropriate for explaining the different internal and external factors that affect at-risk students'/dropouts' careers.

To identify the potential features that might affect at-risk students'/dropouts' careers, social capital theory (Coleman, 1988) should also be taken into consideration. For this perspective, parent-child relationships are deemed important, especially in the case that a child's development is unsatisfactorily supported by the family. More precisely, the human capital of a given family might have less influence on a child's development if it is not supported by social capital (Coleman, 1988). It may be presumed that a child with parents who have a lower level of human capital would still be more advantaged than a child with more capable parents who fail to devote enough time and attention to their education.

In addition, education is also influenced by the acknowledgement of social relations and social capital. According to Putnam (2004), social capital is the effect of social networks and their associated norms and trust. The former author claims that both social networks within and outside schools contribute significantly to the educational process (Putnam, 2004). He

also acknowledges the positive and negative aspects of social capital, as networks can be beneficial for those inside the community, but may also have rather negative effects on those outside it (Putnam, 2001).

According to a number of youth researchers (Bassani, 2007; Holland et al., 2002; Jørgensen, 2011; 2017; Leonard, 2005; Schaefer, 2004), the role of young people's networks that play a part in education have not been explored significantly in social capital theory. Therefore, in educational research more attention should be paid to the participation of students in the networks within which they create social capital (Morrow, 1999; Weller, 2010). In the last decade, the number of research studies that have highlighted the role of peers and peer social capital in education has increased (Anisef et al, 2010; Dipitreo & McGloin, 2012; Greenman, 2011; Ryabov, 2009). When defining peer social capital, peer groups are analysed along certain norms, expectations, achievements, and in-school behaviours (Carbonaro, 2004; Jørgensen, 2011; 2017; Ream & Rumberger, 2008; Ryabov, 2009). The main assumption behind this concept is that students' attitudes and performance are significantly influenced by the peers with whom they associate. This is an important subject, which is illustrated in my findings (in Chapters 6 and 7) to describe the role of peer support in student retention. According to Carbonaro (2004), besides parents' influence, the values and support of peers also have a significant impact on the effort that students make in school. Furthermore, peer support, friendship and active engagement with peers in learning also contribute to students' success in education.

Finally, educational research into peer social capital and social capital has mainly placed the emphasis on achievement or attainment as the result of social relationships (Bassani, 2007). In response to this in the literature, Jørgensen (2017) argues for the extended understanding of peer social capital in her comparative study. The findings of Jørgensen demonstrate that

friends and peers were considered the most important influence on students' lives at school in two different country contexts (England and Spain), underpinning the need to pay more attention to peer social capital. The author also draws attention to the fact that most interpretations of peer social capital are too narrow and neglect broader issues of socio-emotional well-being. Based on her findings, Jørgensen suggests that socio-emotional well-being should be considered a consequence of students' peer social capital in its own right, and that friendship networks influence students' active engagement with peers, helping them find their positions in their community and become motivated to learn. Additionally, peer support can be considered helpful when young people feel lost in different contexts and try to position themselves in various relationships, so it can contribute to young people's self-efficacy, confidence and belief in themselves and in their future. Inspired by Jørgensen's (2017) cross-country study, in the research described in this thesis how peer social capital can create psychological well-being in the lives of at-risk students and dropouts is explored; and moreover, how it can contribute to social inclusion.

In summary, constructivist themes such as how social relations construct individual positions and identity in a given environment and culture have been considered in this subchapter. Additionally, Systems Theory Framework (STF) has been described to demonstrate how individuals operate holistically within multiple contextual systems throughout their lives (McMahon, 2002). Furthermore, the role of social capital and peer social capital in students' engagement in education has been examined. In summing up, it can be stated that the former theories increase understanding of how young people position themselves, and how they are positioned by others in different networks and contexts.



## **2.4 How should careers be constructed?**

In this research described in this thesis, the future perspectives and careers of at-risk students/dropouts are explored in three different urban areas, and stress is placed on describing and understanding how research participants handled changes and challenges in their careers in these contemporary contexts. Careers in the modern global economy require individuals to negotiate volatility and uncertainty in the labour market, as well as constant job changes, without losing their sense of self and social identity. A number of related challenges have been identified in constructionist career theories such as career construction theory or Life Design (Savickas, 2005, 2012, 2013; Savickas et al., 2009), Narrative Career Counselling (Cochran, 1997), Psychodynamic Counselling (Peavy, 1998), Action Theory (Young & Domene, 2012) and the STF/Story telling approach (Patton & McMahon, 1999; McMahon, 2006), all of which are designed to help people acquire career-related skills (e.g. self-efficacy and career adaptability) and deal with changes. These theories share some common features; for instance, they are holistic, the individual makes sense of their experiences through dialogue, and the narrative ‘is built from history, culture, society, relationships and language, and it embodies context’ (Collin & Young, 1992, p. 8). According to Savickas (2005), vocational development is affected by multiple factors, which are interdependent and interactive. Accordingly, the means of assessment should be not as limited to the use of a few tests or an interview, but narrative approaches should be applied to obtain a balanced picture of an individual’s prospects.

Savickas’s career construction theory focusses on the processes through which ‘individuals construct themselves, impose direction on their vocational behaviour, and make meaning of their careers’ (Savickas, 2013, p. 1). The former author considers careers to be boundary-less, requiring subjective construction by the individual and adaptation to changes. Savickas’s

theory 'views career as a story that individuals tell about their working life, not progress down a path or up a ladder' (Savickas, 2013, p. 6). The theory expands Super's 'life-span, life-space' theory (Super, 1957), which emphasises that vocational development involves a process of decision making in vocational choices that are steered by individual self-concept. It also sheds light on developmental contextualism and social context, as well as acknowledges the differences among individuals and among occupations (Hall & Mirvis, 2013). Savickas's career construction theory is a model for understanding vocational behaviour across the life cycle.

The initial concept is self-construction, which starts in childhood as people are firstly actors and only later become agents, and later authors, of their own lives and careers (Hall & Mirvis, 2013; Savickas, 2013). The theory applies social constructionism as a meta-theory for developing the idea of vocational personality types and vocational development duties as processes with potentials. From a constructionist viewpoint, a career is an everlasting process – a pattern of a life theme built up by past memories, present experiences and future aspirations (Savickas, 2005). According to this theory, adaptation to transitions (from school to work, from job to job, and from occupation to occupation) is fostered by five principal types of behaviour: orientation, exploration, establishment, management and disengagement (Savickas, 2013).

In considering adaptability, career construction theory draws attention to specific attitudes, beliefs and aptitudes – 'the four Cs' – that shape the problem-solving strategies and coping behaviours that individuals apply to integrate their vocational self-concepts with work roles. The 'four Cs' of career construction are career *concern*, *control*, *curiosity*, and *confidence* (Savickas, 2013). Career concern refers to a future orientation and recognition of the importance of planning that is characterised by optimism. Career control requires the ability

to control one's own choices. Career curiosity follows self-control, as an individual becomes curious about their interests, wishes and occupational alternatives in the labour market. The important role of curiosity is reflected in the attention which is paid to exploration in other theories of career development (Savickas, 2013). Career confidence reflects self-efficacy or anticipating success regarding education and career opportunities on the labour market (Savickas, 2013).

Career construction theory is strongly related to the concept of career adapt-ability (Bimrose et al., 2011; Savickas, 1997; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Wright & Frigerio, 2015). Career adaptability is a multidimensional construct (including control, curiosity, cooperation, confidence and concern) that refers to how individuals handle transitions in different phases of their lives and in different contexts. From a skills supply perspective, career adaptability can be considered a psychosocial competence related to adaptation to the disequilibrium caused by occupational traumas and transitions related to employment, or the exploration of new challenges in the labour market (Savickas, 2013). The definition of career adaptability is 'the capability of an individual to make a series of successful transitions where the labour market, organisation of work and underlying occupational and organisational knowledge bases may be subject to considerable change' (Bimrose et al., 2011, p. 2). The concept is used in the research described in this thesis since it reinforces the idea that, for young adults, career adaptability is a developmental task.

In the related literature, there have only been a few qualitative investigations of career adaptability using in-depth interviews to explore psychological factors, individual networks and support, and opportunities and career orientation related to an individual's career adaptability (McMahon, Watson, & Bimrose, 2010). Nonetheless, this approach would help with understanding how career adaptability can positively impact the skills of young people,

and their careers and future perspectives. For this reason, the last chapter (Chapter 8) of this doctoral research that presents the findings is designed to contribute to understanding how second chance programmes have developed at-risk students'/dropouts' career adapt-ability through an analysis of qualitative interviews, using Savickas's (Savickas, 2013) career adaptability framework. Understanding career adaptability in different social/societal contexts is strategically important because it can provide real information about the readiness of young people to engage in different employment, education and training contexts. This knowledge may be considered an important contribution, because new technology, globalisation, and the challenges of the volatile labour market are requiring workers to construct their careers more actively.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This review of the literature has explicated the theoretical foundations of the presently described empirical doctoral research into problems and issues related to ESL. The intellectual journey was undertaken to explore relevant conceptual tools and theoretical frames. It revealed contextual debates and issues regarding ESL and educational inequality, as well as measures that have been taken to reduce ESL, including career development and guidance counselling. Four main strands were reviewed and discussed, showing how they formed the background for the analysis. The first theoretical strand consisted of research that has its point of departure in social constructivism, which acts as an overarching theory throughout the literature review. The second theoretical strand examined how the concept of ESL is constructed in different contexts. The third theoretical strand looked at how young people's positions are constructed as a result of social interactions and networks using the concept of social representations, social capital and related concepts. Finally, the fourth

strand addressed issues of career construction, focusing on Savickas's career construction theory, and career adaptability.

In conclusion, social constructionism as an overarching theory was found relevant for interpreting the terms and concepts related to ESL, together with the different measures that exist to combat ESL that are applied in the three countries under investigation. Regarding the comparative perspective of this research which considers how at-risk students'/dropouts' careers are constructed, social constructivism and its associated strands provided an adaptable framework for analysing the voices and perspectives of young people who are subject to substantially different policy contexts.

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design**

In this chapter, the methodological approach used for the research study is explained and discussed, revealing the empirical and practical background for the data analysis. First, the selected approach is positioned within the broader field of qualitative research. Second, grounded theory is examined in terms of its main strands and characteristics related to the present research effort. Third, the main features of theoretical sampling and the challenges faced at the three fieldwork sites are discussed. Fourth, the circumstances of context familiarisation and the detailed process of interviewing are explained. Fifth, the grounded theory used to analyse the data is introduced, comprising: a description of the continuing discovery of themes, which guide further data collection; the coding of data and creation of categories; and finally, the contextualisation of findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Finally, the researcher's role in the field and related reflexivity are discussed.

The present research investigates the voices of dropouts. Thus, it applied a research methodology, which is especially appropriate for grasping the perspective and life-worlds of the participants (Bednarek-Gilland, 2015; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Knapik, 2006; Patton, 1990). The methodological approach that was adopted enabled the researcher to better perceive the accounts provided by individual respondents. Hearing students' voices is essential for mapping out effective measures and designing institutional responses to tackle ESL, as well as facilitating the integration of youth into education and the labour market. The constructionist paradigm is commonly associated with qualitative research methods, and provides richness and depth of understanding of data. It is, for instance, exemplified in Crotty's (1998) knowledge framework:

**Table 3.1: Examples of Crotty’s knowledge framework, reproduced after (Crotty, 1998, p. 17)**

<b>Epistemology</b>	<b>Theoretical perspective</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Methods</b>
Objectivism	Positivism, Post-positivism	Experimental research, Survey research	Sampling, Measurement and scaling, Statistical analysis, Questionnaire, Focus group, Interview
Constructivism	Interpretivism Critical inquiry Feminism	Ethnography, Grounded theory, Phenomenological research, Heuristic inquiry, Action research, Feminist standpoint research	Qualitative interview, Observation Case study, Life history, Narrative, Theme identification
Subjectivism	Postmodernism, Structuralism, Post-structuralism	Discourse theory, Archaeology, Genealogy	Auto-ethnography, Semiotics, Literary analysis

Following Crotty’s knowledge framework (1998), which incorporates a clear differentiation between the three epistemological positions, my research is inspired by the constructivist strand with its related methodology and methods. More precisely, the methodology (grounded theory) and methods (sampling, qualitative interviews and observation) were applied to explore how students construct their experiences in interaction between discourse and context. For this reason, qualitative (semi-structured) interviews were conducted with young people during a phase of comparative fieldwork in England, Denmark and Hungary, carried out over the course of 14 months from 2014 to 2015. In addition, professionals such as teachers, career counsellors, social workers and policy makers were interviewed to facilitate mapping of the distinctive characteristics of the country and local contexts. To gain deeper insight into the students’ everyday lives at school and into the school climate in the contexts of three second-chance provisions under study, observations were conducted in

England, Denmark and Hungary. By listening to the voices of young people, my analysis focussed on the relevance and importance of personal support with special regard to understanding positive relationships, such as those between the mentor and the student, the career counsellor and the student, as well as peer support and friendship as motivating factors for engaging in learning and attending an educational establishment. The analysis presents how the subjects described their time at school, negative experiences in mainstream settings, and their learning pathways in second chance provisions; moreover, it describes their interpretation of the influences that they consider important for their careers in education, and later in their adult lives.

The qualitative research design adopted for this study is as follows:

**Table 3.2: Qualitative research design**

Research Questions	Qualitative Methods
How are the education and training policies (with special regard to career guidance) that aim to reduce ESL in the three countries in the study designed?	<i>Desk research</i> <i>Interviews</i> with policy makers
What institutional alternatives are offered to at-risk students in the three countries under study?	<i>Semi-structured interviews</i> with school leaders, teachers, counsellors, mentors, social workers and local decision makers
What are the factors that motivate at-risk students and dropouts to stay in a supportive teaching-learning environment, and how do these impact their future career and learning pathways?	<i>Retrospective interviews</i> with students after they obtain qualifications; <i>Observations</i>

To create an understanding of the contexts, quantitative data were collected using international (e.g. OECD database, EUROSTAT) and national data sources (e.g. data on youth unemployment, on the ESL/NEET rate; Act on Public Education, National Core Curriculum, local curriculum, and official documents from the relevant institutions). These data were important for comparing and contrasting country characteristics related to the



education system and to the number of early school leavers and unemployed youngsters. These elements are detailed in Chapters 4 and 5.

The design of qualitative research provides the researcher with the flexibility needed to obtain insight and explore the depth, richness, and complexity in the phenomenon under study (Flick, 2009). The flexible qualitative research approach applied in this research is inspired by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which guides the sampling of participants, data collection, data recording and data analysis (Crotty, 1998). The versatile nature and maximal openness of grounded theory is adopted as a method of conceptualising what helped at-risk students and/or drop-outs identify various career pathways.

### **3.1.1 Grounded theory as method and theory**

Grounded theory, a research methodology linked to qualitative research, was first described by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967. According to its founders, the aim of grounded theory is ‘to generate or discover a theory’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.2) from interviews with participants who would all have experienced a phenomenon (i.e. some process/situation that was common to them all) (Creswell, 2007). This indicates that proponents of grounded theory do not test hypotheses taken from pre-existing theoretical frameworks, but rather explore new ‘theory’ grounded in empirical data (Dunne, 2011). A key idea is that theory-development does not come ‘off-the-shelf’, but is rather ‘grounded’ in data collected from participants, so the researcher deductively generates a theory of a process, action, or interaction (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). Grounded theory consists of some specific elements – such as constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling –, which are distinct from other methodologies as data collection and analysis are concurrent, rather than a linear sequence (Dunne, 2011).

Generally speaking, grounded theory focusses on qualitative data (e.g. interview transcripts or protocols of observations) and the use of concepts as categories, codes and sets of coding to generate theory (Flick, 2009). According to Corbin and Strauss (1990) the grounded theory approach should include three elements:

- Theoretical coding, which theoretically generates strong concepts from the data to explain the phenomenon under study;
- Theoretical sampling; that is, processing data collection when the researcher simultaneously collects, codes, and analyses data and decides what data to collect next to develop a theory as it emerges (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In practice, this suggests starting data analysis with the first interview, and writing down memos and concepts at an early stage;
- Development of a strong theory through continuous comparison between phenomena and contexts (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

A significant advantage of the grounded theory method is that basic social processes can be discovered in the data, which help the researcher to discover new knowledge as well as interconnections within the research topic. In this doctoral research, grounded theory as a methodology is applied to analyse data collected from interviews with former at-risk students/drop-outs, and to generate or discover theory from first-hand data. Glaser and Strauss's (1965, 1967) conception underpins the choice of methodology in this research: the authors state that grounded theory is optimal for exploring integral social relationships and the behaviour of groups where there has been little exploration of the contextual factors that affect individual's lives (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Regarding the use of literature in grounded theory, various approaches have been taken by scholars. Since the 1990s, Glaser has been involved with the various interpretations of the methodology, which ultimately resulted in his ideological split from Strauss (Dunne, 2011). Namely, Glaser believes that developing grounded theory from a preliminary early literature review would lead to confusion as it might potentially reduce the quality and originality of the research. In contrast, Strauss and Corbin urge an early review of relevant literature; this point of difference resulted in the split with Glaser (Dunne, 2011). More precisely, according to Corbin and Strauss (2008) a researcher can turn to the literature before starting fieldwork in order to formulate questions for observations and interviews. Moreover, in the process of analysis relevant literature can also be referred to with a view to raising questions that enable the comparison of findings with the literature (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In addition, Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.326) states that: “Since no researcher enters into the process with a completely blank and empty mind, interpretations are deductions or researcher’s abstraction of what the data is indicating...This method is inductive in the sense that findings are derived from data”.

From the two popular approaches to grounded theory applied in social research (Flick, 2009) – the systematic procedures of Corbin and Strauss (1998, 2008) and the constructivist approach of Charmaz (2006) – I chose to use the former for the analysis of data gathered from the three field sites. Since I was inexperienced in the field of grounded theory, it seemed reasonable to use the more structured procedures inspired by Corbin and Strauss’s approach (Charmaz’s [2006] perspective seemed to be more abstract, emphasising diverse local worlds, views, and actions). Therefore, I decided to follow the main principles defined in Corbin and Strauss’s book entitled *Basics of Qualitative Research* (2008), as it gave a structured but also flexible frame for the analysis.

Instead of going into the field with a blank mind, as the introductory grounded theory approach requires from the researcher (Glaser & Strauss, 1965), I started data collection with some key concepts I obtained from previous work experience with the target group and from relevant literature.

The principal stage of data collection was conducted with a reasonably haphazard group of people (two former students from Denmark, and two from Hungary). Early analysis of these interviews enabled some initial codes to be derived from the data and formulation of questions for the observations and interviews.

Remaining sensitive to theory was challenging at the beginning when creating analytical codes and categories as I sometimes caught myself using pre-existing conceptualisations in the development process, rather than concepts derived from the data. In order to overcome these instincts, I read the interview transcripts and field notes several times to further sensitise myself to concepts arising from the data, moreover my reflexivity as a researcher demonstrated itself using three reflective diaries (one for each country). Additionally, the simultaneous collection and analysis of data also contributed to data-driven concept development. Writing memos when constructing codes and abstract categories was also an asset. For instance, when concepts emerged from the research participants' interviews related to how teachers had taught in second chance provision, memos helped me better construe what research participants had described. I thus created categories that reflected on my memos such as *'flexible teaching methods'* and *'egalitarian learning community'*. Later on, the integration of categories into a theoretical framework was challenging as I created at least 126 categories. The first important consideration was to identify a kind of chronological order due to the research participants' career trajectories. Accordingly, three mind maps indicating three important milestones in the research participants' stories (before second

chance, during second chance, and after second chance) were used to clarify categories, as well as their hierarchy and the relations between them. For instance, when I analysed teaching in second chance provision three important categories emerged as the main categories in the hierarchy, namely, *'the role of teachers'*, *'teaching-learning environment'* and *'methods'*. In addition, literature was used in a few cases. For example, when identity and confidence issues arose, I read the theories of Bandura (2006) and Breakwell (1983) and compared them with the emerging categories to construct the theory.

Finally, it should be summarised that grounded theory is an active meaning-making process between the researcher and participants, which derives from interaction, and the researcher's perspective is part of the process (Charmaz, 2006). The dynamics of this process inspired and motivated me during the data collection and analysis; moreover, it helped me realise what the participants considered significant in the three different contexts. Hence, grounded theory was deemed a suitable methodology for revealing the voices of at-risk students/drop-outs from Denmark, England and Hungary.

### **3.1.2 Ethical Considerations**

Bearing in mind that some interviews and observations were conducted with vulnerable groups of people, clear ethical considerations were adopted in this research. I adhered to the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines and the Ethical Guidelines of the University of Warwick. These guidelines enabled me to consider all aspects of the process of conducting research on at-risk students and drop-outs, such as gaining informed consent, undergoing an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check, informing all participants about the research prior to interviews and observations, and obtaining the research participants' contact details through school staff. The British Educational Research

Association acknowledges that all research should be conducted with an ethic of respect for the knowledge, subject, the quality of educational research, democratic values and academic freedom. During the fieldwork, I strived to treat all participants fairly, sensitively, with dignity, and with respect and freedom from prejudice regardless of their age, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, faith, disability or any other dimension. An application for ethical approval was successfully submitted to the Ethics Committee of the Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick (Appendix 1). The fieldwork was conducted in three countries, namely England, Denmark and Hungary. Outside of England, I adhered to the same ethical standards as I did for research in England.

During the fieldwork, at the beginning of the academic year, the school leadership in Denmark and in Hungary asked me to introduce myself and the research to the teachers and the students. In England, there was no student room or forum for following the same introduction process. I ensured that all participants fully understood the research process, telling them why their participation was necessary, as well as how and to whom the findings would be reported. A short description of the research and the consent form were sent before the interview to secure the participants' voluntary involvement and to inform each participant appropriately. Potential participants received project information and a consent form via email which provided details about what taking part in the research would involve, any benefits or risks, their right to withdraw, who to approach for further information, and how to complain about the research process. Participants were informed that: their participation and interactions were being analysed for the research; information and data about them would be kept confidential; and that their details would be anonymised. In addition, participants were assured that systems (e.g. career counsellors and social workers) were in place for referral who would take all necessary steps to put them at their ease should they need additional support due to distress or discomfort as a result of the research intervention (Alderson &

Morrow, 2011). It was also noted that I had worked with young people for many years as an experienced and trained youth worker, which reassured some and attracted the interest of others. Research participants asked questions about my experiences. These introductory talks helped break the ice and built trust between the research participants and me. At the English fieldwork site, a young man with a very severe speech impediment and stutter volunteered to come to an interview as his teacher very helpfully asked him to do so. I was able to draw upon my experience as a speech and language therapist (SLT) and welcomed the young man to the interview. I followed the SLT first meeting method procedure, which recommends using short questions that are easy to answer (such as age, and mainly closed questions requiring 'yes' or 'no') to limit the young man's embarrassment. The interview was not recorded.

### **3.2 Setting and Sampling**

This comparative fieldwork was carried out over the course of 14 months from 2014 to 2015 in England, Denmark and Hungary. As part of the research, 28 successful former students were interviewed, and observations were undertaken in second chance provisions.

The Thematic Working Group on ESL underlines in a survey that there is a need to study the settings in which students pursue their studies and feel valued and listened to (TWG, 2013). This is why I chose three reputedly supportive educational institutions located in the three countries under investigation. Access to the three participant institutions was obtained via the E2C with whom, as an active member of the association, I have had professional and personal connections for eight years. I consider it an additional advantage that I have lived, studied and worked as a teacher and/or young researcher in all three countries. These three fieldwork sites Support School – Øresund City (Denmark), Helping School – Paprika City

(Hungary), Landing College – Grey Town (England), were selected to provide contrasting policy contexts. Each represents a model of educational provision with different levels of success for the target group of this research investigation. These institutions are members of E2C, which means that the teaching methodology significantly differs from the mechanisms in use at mainstream schools as they focus on individual students' needs (Day et al, 2013).

### **3.2.1 Accessing participants at the fieldwork sites**

The overall sample for my doctoral research includes policy makers, teachers, school leaders, career counsellors, mentors and social workers, but mainly former students of the three participant institutions who obtained a qualification. A total of 28 interviews were conducted with successful former students to explore young people's views on education, moreover 21 interviews with professionals (policy makers, teachers, school leaders, career counsellors, mentors and social workers), which were used to describe the policy context of the three countries under investigation; the contextual details are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. The former student participants were selected from the sampled institutions in negotiation with the school leadership and/or the career counsellor, social worker or teacher using the criteria that they were at-risk students/dropouts prior to second chance provision, and due to the positive effects of second chance education they had obtained a qualification. The findings of these interviews are presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. The different stakeholders and grass routes professionals were selected in negotiation with the school leadership as they were informed about local opportunities, furthermore I also asked relevant experts (e.g. the local E2C representative) for potential contacts. In addition, there were some cases when a local expert after the interview advised me to turn to a relevant local professional to get more informed about the given topic.



Theoretical sampling was used in this research as part of the grounded theory approach. I faced many challenges whilst undertaking my fieldwork, including the availability of gatekeepers, changing countries within the limited period of time, and using my financial resources effectively to collect the data I had planned to from the three countries under analysis. These factual details and the three research contexts that formed the basis for this project shaped the practical ways in which I was able to apply the methods described above. Therefore, theoretical sampling processes were not as rigorously implemented as the related literature (Corbin & Strauss, 1998; Draucker et al., 2007) suggests. Accordingly, I went into the three fieldwork sites with a focus on obtaining responses to the most interesting initial question and to gather information about the concepts I wanted to learn about. The leading question was: *What are the factors that motivate at-risk students/drop-outs to stay in a supportive teaching-learning environment, and how do these impact their future career and learning pathways?*

In order to maximise the chances of promptly starting my fieldwork, the same procedures were followed to negotiate access to research participants. More specifically, each participant institution was approached a year in advance and my doctoral research was introduced. Each visit consisted of discussions with the school leadership and/or relevant professionals; moreover, I sent the research proposal and the additional upgrade documents, including the approved ethical approval form (Appendix 1) with the copy of my DSB, to inform research participants thoroughly about the research project. In the case of Denmark and Hungary, gatekeepers were able to help soon after my arrival, and put me in contact with some former students. In England, the relevant gatekeepers were not available to help, even though I followed the same initial procedure to avoid any delay in my research. I visited Landing College twice before the fieldwork, but due to staff changes my initial contacts were no longer available to act as gatekeepers. Access to the organisation had to be renegotiated,

causing some delay. This involved resending my research proposal and the ethical approval, as well as speaking to college leadership. The initial visits to this fieldwork site were spent in the canteen and the library where I was able to familiarise myself with the atmosphere of the college. After some time at the fieldwork site, I was able to negotiate permission to observe some classes, but my role was not fully understood.

After conducting the first interviews in Paprika City and Øresund City, I transcribed the interviews and wrote short memos. Preliminary analysis revealed that each participant had had a lot of negative experiences and failures in primary education, which led them to drop out of their first secondary school: as one of them claimed, he ‘was mistreated by the system’. After listening to these stories, I became more curious about why people become at-risk students and/or drop-outs. I shared my initial findings with the career counsellor and the school leader in Øresund City, and with the social workers in Paprika City to help convince them to put me in contact with a diverse group of at-risk students/drop-outs. The Danish and the Hungarian professionals understood the purpose of the new direction of data collection and helped identify and put me in contact with potential interviewees. They contacted former students on Facebook, sharing a short description of the research and my contact details. Most former students who were approached, were willing to participate, and emailed me to request that they preferred to maintain contact with me on Facebook because, as they said, ‘Facebook is fancy and trendy’ among young people and Messenger is fast and commonly used on smartphones. From these responses, I realised the power and importance of social media in their lives. Consequently, it can be seen that the sampling in these two fieldwork sites was based on negotiations and considerations of new criteria regarding how to select the sample, following the main principles of theoretical sampling.

In contrast, the sampling procedure in the UK was more haphazard as there was limited opportunity to work with the relevant gatekeepers due to the delays in negotiating and renegotiating access. No interviews were undertaken during the first visit, but with the support of some teachers, a number of interviews with former students were undertaken. Students were approached in different ways. First, an active student wrote a letter about my research at the request of a teacher that was posted to potential interviewees. Second, a teacher provided me with a list of former students with contact details, highlighting those who might be interested. Following this, I took the lead in negotiating access to the interviewees from the list. Third, a teacher emailed a couple of former students, introducing me and informing them about my research, copying me in. As a consequence of these experiences with accessing students, it was evident that theoretical sampling was not feasible in the English case. Therefore, random and snowball sampling were applied; a small group of initial people were used to nominate, through their social networks, other participants to take part who met the eligibility criteria. As the sample number increased, enough data were gathered to be useful in research (Morgan, 2008).

In practice, I made several telephone calls from the teachers' office using the list of potential interviewees. I also asked some interviewees if they could recommend a friend from their former class who might be willing to take part in my research as well. There was an interesting moment in the process of recruitment when a potential participant with Asperger's syndrome emailed me indicating that she was more than eager to talk about her positive experiences, and added that she would like to come with her best friend, who had attended the same class. I replied immediately encouraging them to arrange a meeting. This approach boosted the potential pool of interviewees.

Consequently, the processes of negotiating access to participants in the three research contexts were different. This shaped the practical ways in which theoretical sampling was applied. It was easier to gain access in Denmark and Hungary where gatekeepers were more able to help. In England, a more strategic approach to sampling was used, which allowed me to conduct a sufficient number of interviews, thereby enabling a theory-driven analysis that reflects Corbin's observation: 'a researcher can do a high level analysis on whatever data he or she has' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.150).

### **3.3 Context familiarisation in the three educational institutions**

Observation had a complementary function in this research: first, it was used to form the basis of some interview questions and to obtain deeper insights into a context in which the research participants felt appreciated and supported. Second, field notes collected during observations acted as additional data for describing each local context and the interventions that were taking place (see Chapter 4), and the process of making categories and codes in the analysis of grounded theory.

According to the tentative work programme, each educational setting could have been visited three times (each visit for approx. three-four weeks) in the three different phases of the academic year (the beginning, middle and the end). The initial idea was to observe different classes or activities to obtain first-hand experience of the given institution's everyday life. Even though all of the participant institutions agreed with my research plan, the fieldwork in practice was shaped differently by the given circumstances of the data collection sites, as indicated earlier.

During the fieldwork phase, three field diaries were kept - one for each fieldwork site - to record experiences and some methodological reflections and memos, which contributed additional data in the process of making categories and codes in the analysis. Diary writing started with the first visit to Paprika City in the summer of 2014 when I took part in the recruitment of students for the following year. After the summer holiday, teachers were very flexible and welcoming, thus I participated in as many different classes as possible. At the beginning of each class, the teacher sought permission from their students to allow me to stay; they always agreed. There were some participatory elements in the observations, because I mostly acted as a student (I sat among them, worked on the same tasks and did the same activities they did). During break times, I mingled with the crowd, chatting with students and teachers. I also took part in different free time activities, such as film clubs, excursions, the Christmas party and a former students' party. In addition, I participated in some of the regular weekly teachers' meetings where every student's current situation, issues and problems were discussed to keep every teacher informed, and to identify the right solution to each problem in a shared way.

In Øresund City, similarly to Paprika City, teachers were helpful. At the beginning of each visit, I discussed the proposed observations with the principal, and she liaised with the teachers concerned. Teachers always asked the class if they felt comfortable with my presence, and then explained I was doing research. Even though my understanding of the Danish language is fairly good, we decided at the beginning that I would visit mostly English classes to avoid any problems associated with the language barrier. In the second and the third phase, I visited every type of class that was held in Danish. Some participatory elements also occurred here in the observations because I was involved in each class as a kind of student, participating in the learning experience. In the breaks, I had the chance to talk to students and teachers in the very laid-back atmosphere which characterises all of school life.

In addition, I participated in a range of social events. Both in Paprika City and in Øresund City, career education classes were observed, helping me understand what young people could learn about different career options and about themselves and their aptitudes in the two educational settings.

In Grey Town, at the beginning of the first phase of the fieldwork I benefitted from the help of an international coordinator. The coordinator arranged introductions with the teachers, and then I obtained permission to visit and observe some of the classes and other activities. There was always a distance between teachers and me that I could not reduce, and I felt that my presence was somewhat intrusive. In the course of the fieldwork, I followed some of the classes offered by the Prince's Trust, and I observed the student recruitment process. Moreover, I actively took part in a fund-raising event with the students in the local community, and finally I attended a course closing ceremony. During the volunteering programme, I also observed some classes, one tutorial and one event making. In the Life Skills Programme, I spent some days in different classes specifically intended for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder and learning difficulties. Similar to the other two field sites, at the start of each class I was introduced and consent was obtained for me to observe and talk to the students. Finally, due to the international coordinator's help, I spent a day in the Forest School where team-building activities are organised for students, and I was invited to an international conference on ESL, which took place in the College.

In summary, it can be concluded that even though observations were time-consuming, they enabled me to learn about the activities of the young people under study in the settings where they feel valued. As Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue, 'observations put researchers right where the action is, in a place where they can see what is going on' (p.30). Similarly, Patton (2002) states that 'creative fieldwork means using every part of oneself to experience what is

happening. Creative insights come from being directly involved in the setting being studied' (p.32). The observations conducted in this research contributed to the development of the sampling guidelines, the interview questions and, furthermore, to use of the field notes to describe contexts and to create categories.

### **3.4 Interviews**

According to constructionist methodology, fostering the relationship between researcher and research participant is essential for obtaining access to the subjective experience (Miller & Glassner, 2004). As Miller and Glassner (2004) argue, the researcher should show genuine interest and should not be judgemental of research participants if they wish to build trust. In order to fully inform potential participants, I sent a project information sheet and a consent form (see Appendix 6 and 7) to them via email before interview. The interviews were mainly conducted in Hungarian and English. In Denmark, English was primarily used, but some Danish words, sentences and expressions were used as these were considered more precise. Moreover, the interviewees felt more confident switching to Danish when needed. One interview in Denmark was interpreted by a teacher as the interviewee could not speak English. Subsequently, the interviews were analysed in different languages and the excerpts included throughout the thesis are in English. Two pilot interviews were carried out in Paprika City and Øresund City to test the interview guide that proved that the questions were relevant for generating understanding of the research topic. Due to the late start in England, the interview guides were not piloted in Grey Town.

As already indicated, accessing potential interviewees occurred differently in the three fieldwork sites. In Paprika City and Øresund City, most interviews were face-to-face and arranged via social media. In Grey Town, potential interviewees were contacted by telephone

and interviews were arranged this way. To allow interviewees' voices to be heard, semi-structured interviews were conducted (Appendix 7). An interview guide was designed with key questions, which were grouped thematically, for easy reference. According to grounded theory, interview questions can change to follow theoretical sampling and analysis. Unstructured interviews were conducted with two interviewees who related their stories after the first question. When they had finished their narrative, questions were asked to assist with further elaboration.

The settings of the interviews were in convenient locations where interruptions could be avoided to enable adequate sound recordings of conversations to be made. In Paprika City, interviews were mostly conducted in a small office provided by the school, at a café close to the school, and in two workplaces. In Øresund City, the school provided an office where most interviews took place, two participants asked me to go to their homes as they lived in the suburbs, and one interview was conducted at a workplace. In Grey Town, the interviews were mainly conducted in a small office, but when the office was occupied the interviews took place in a corridor where I could not make adequate recordings. After conducting each interview, short notes, methodological reflections and memos were entered in the field diary, and subsequently used in the analytical process. I transcribed the interviews, which were then reviewed to inform the following data collection procedure (see Corbin & Strauss, 2008), using NVivo software as part of the grounded theory process.



### 3.5 Data analysis

In grounded theory, data collection and data analysis is an on-going and dialectic process. As indicated, NVivo was used for coding, without the intention of fixing labels to data. Rather, I followed a reflective approach to the analysis by constantly comparing categories and writing memos at the same time. To begin with, each interview was read thoroughly, and then the data were split into manageable pieces. Open coding required brainstorming conceptual labels for applying to data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The names of different codes sometimes changed when I reconsidered the ideas contained in each quote. For instance, there was a section of text I first coded as *'teachers picked on him'*, but then I renamed it *'I could not fit in'* using an in-vivo code to emphasise the research participant's point of view. According to Corbin, participants sometimes provide a conceptualisation, 'a term that they use to speak about something is so vivid and descriptive that the researcher borrows it as 'in-vivo code' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.160).

After open-coding, I created concepts ranging from lower- to higher-level. Higher-level concepts are called categories/themes, and categories demonstrate what a group of lower-level concepts indicate (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Coding required searching for the right words to describe conceptually what was indicated by the data. I used my intuition, previous knowledge about the field, and sometimes the literature to express what the text meant. For instance, low categories included *'1-to-1 problem solving'*; *'student-centred approach'*; and *'time for self-development'*. *'Actual knowledge matters'* created a higher-level category called *'individual study pathways'*, which became a part of a high-level category called *'encouraging learning environment'*. To link categories, axial coding was used, which is a process of 'crosscutting or relating concepts to each other' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.195). This is an instinctive process, because our minds automatically make connections between

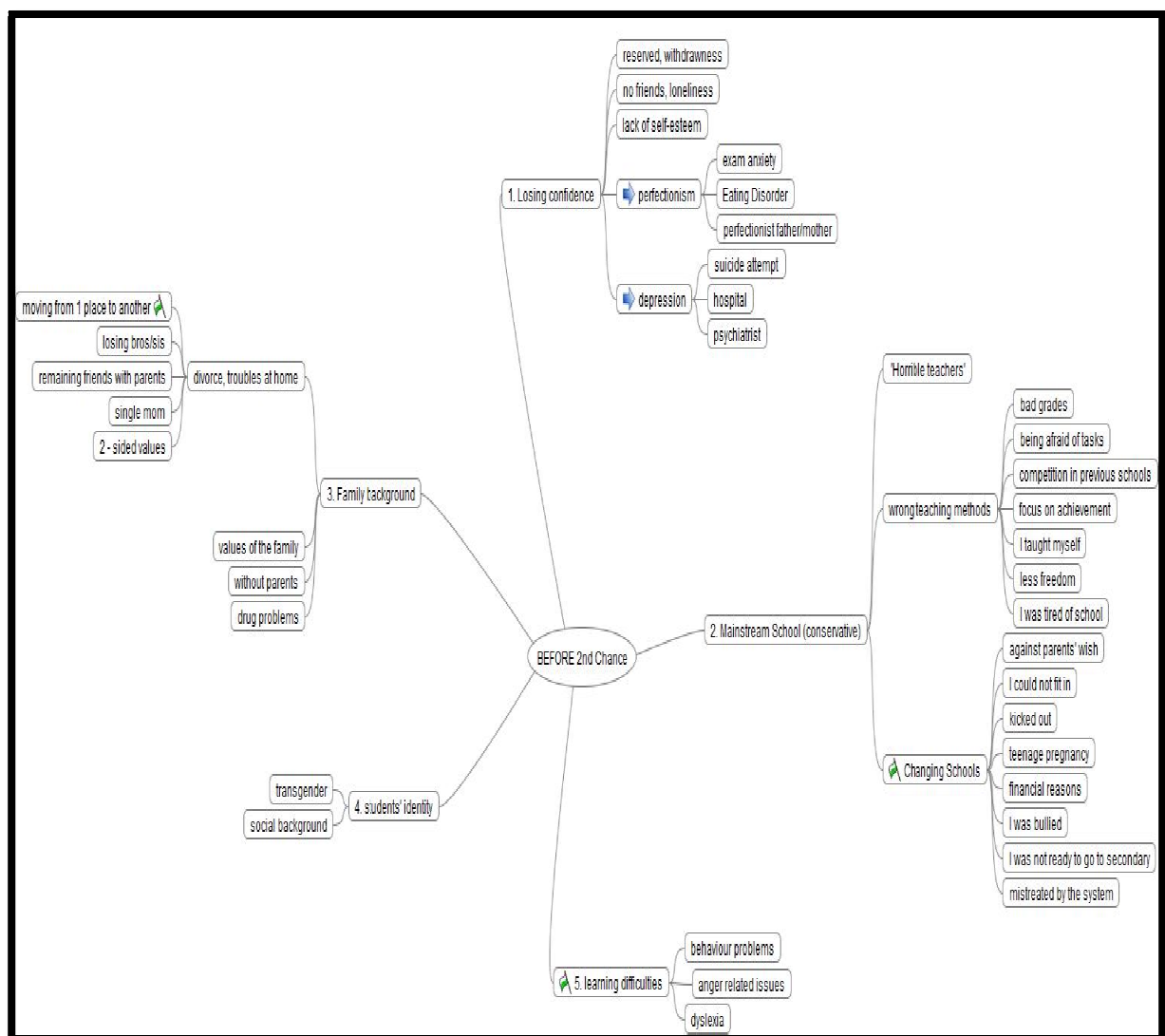
concepts that come from data. For example, '*bad grades*' and '*focus on achievement*', where '*bad grades*' was the lesser concept and '*focus on achievement*' was the broader concept. Of course, the connection between these was based on data provided by research participants. Accordingly, it can be understood that bad grades were caused by the wrong approach to the process of teaching and learning, or in other words a '*focus on achievement*', which is a part of the high-level category '*wrong teaching methods*'.

As categories were linked, they were also elaborated 'like putting together a series of interlinking blocks to build a pyramid' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.199). There were times when theoretical comparisons were used to avoid uncertainty in classifying incidents. The specific incidents we use in the case of theoretical comparisons can be derived from the literature, and experience (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For instance, when incidents related to school life were identified I used my teaching experience and sometimes literature, too: for example, in identifying the category student-centred approach: '... I got the support I needed ... From teachers, from Ulla (guidance counsellor) too ... It was normal, it was nice ...'. Towards the end of the analysis I filled in categories until the research reached the point of saturation, which is usually defined as the time when no new data emerge. However, saturation is more than just a matter of no new data, as it also denotes the 'development of categories in terms of their properties and dimensions, including variation ...' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.143).

During the process of analysis, I realised that all the interviews followed a similar chronological order, as with students' experiences: first, from primary / lower secondary education; second, from upper secondary / second chance; and finally, life after second-chance education. To distinguish between nodes and the different stages of respondents' careers, I applied numbers to the three main categories such as: before second chance

provision = 1, during second chance provision = 2, and after second chance provision = 3, thereby creating an easier-to-follow chronological order. After saturating and linking categories, I created three mind maps (called Before second chance, Second chance and After second chance) to integrate categories and themes. The three mind maps are as follows:

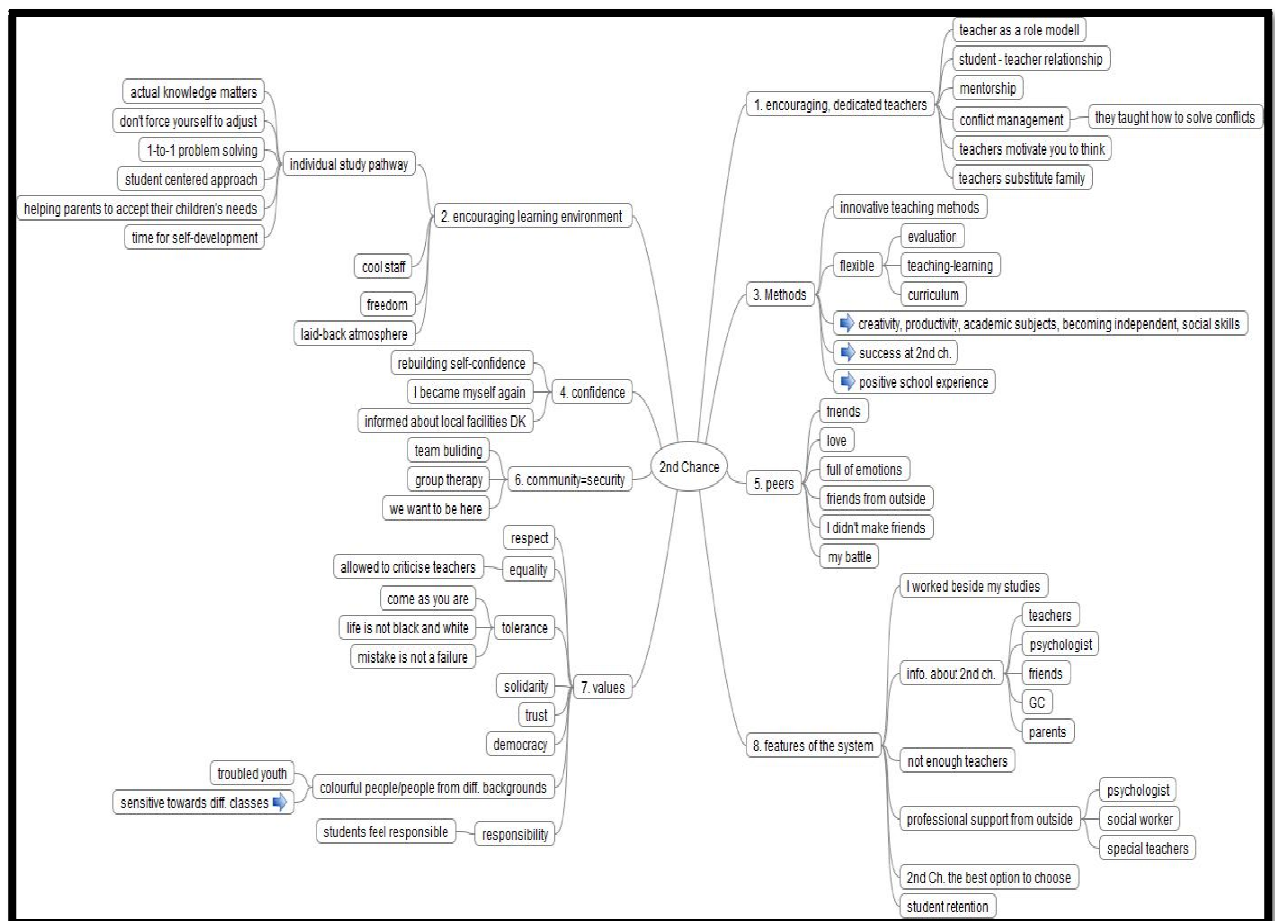
**Figure 3.1: Specific categories in my analysis focussing on experiences and problems resulting in the choice of Second Chance Education**



The first mind map (see Figure 3.1) illustrates the negative experiences of the young people in school and in their families, and the influences they specified that resulted in their leaving mainstream education. A number of causes and experiences were identified. Even though the

factors, which influence their experiences are complex and multi-faceted, there are a number of more general themes and commonalities in their narratives. The first category relates to confidence issues, which are linked to teachers and the methodology applied in mainstream education, and to different, family-related problems. In addition, issues associated with young people's well-being, learning difficulties and identity were recognised.

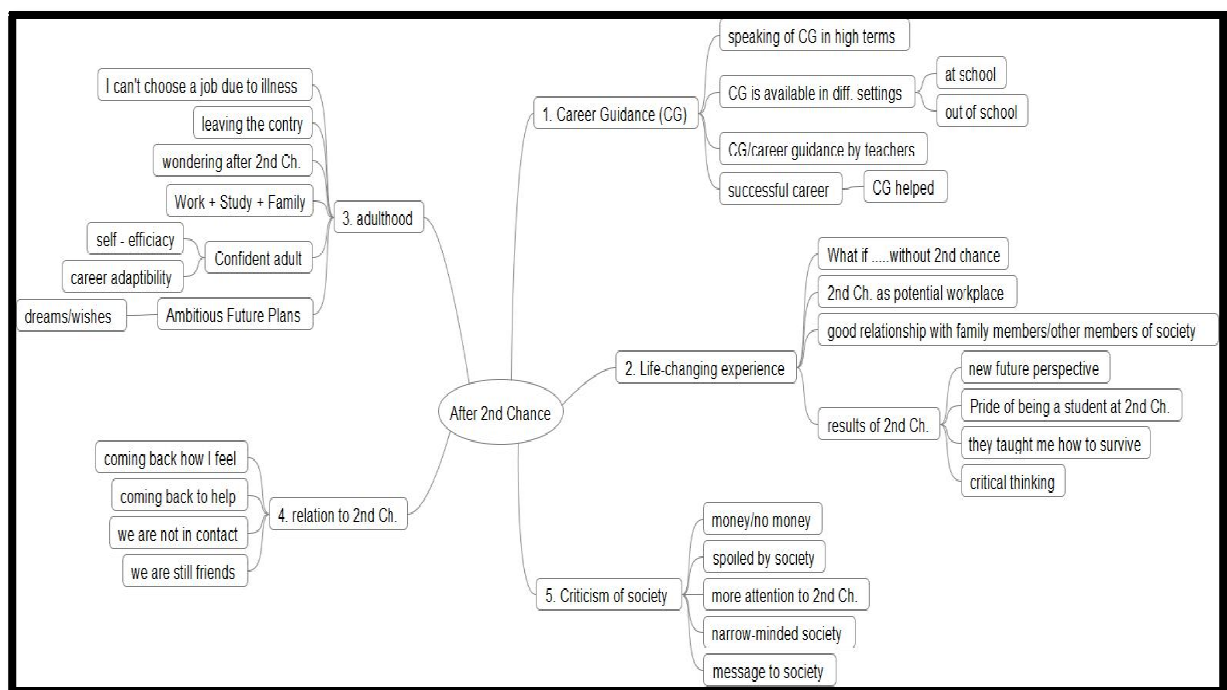
**Figure 3.2: Specific categories in my analysis focussing on factors and positive influences of students in Second Chance that made them retrain in education**



The second mind map (see Figure 3.2) illustrates the young people's positive experiences in second chance provisions, and the different processes and agents that helped transform students' negative relationships with school. The most influential categories are encouraging, dedicated teachers and an encouraging learning environment, plus tolerant/diverse and

egalitarian values, diverse teaching methods, and peer-to-peer support in this secure environment. In addition, confidence issues – at the personal level – emerged from data that are associated with the characteristics and nature of second chance education.

**Figure 3.3: Specific categories in my analysis focussing on Second Chance as a life-changing experience resulting in better career options**



The third mind map (see Figure 3.3) illustrates young people’s perspectives about the different influences they believed had affected their future careers. First, the role of career education and career guidance applied in second chance provisions is deemed an important category. Second, the category of adulthood is significant, and reflects on former students’ accounts of how they experienced adulthood, including the world of education and/or the world of work, after different second chance provisions. Finally, the third influential theme, called ‘*Criticism of society*’, introduces former students’ critical voices that emphasise the importance of second chance provisions and the significance of the role of policymaking.

The findings of the theory-driven analysis are presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. As the theory is constructed from raw data, it represents an abstract interpretation of those raw data. Therefore, it is crucial to validate the theoretical scheme. There are different methods of validation: one is to go back and compare the scheme against the raw data, while another is to actually tell the story to respondents and ask them to say how well the scheme seems to cover their particular case (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I decided to apply the second process of validation because I wanted to involve my research participants' points of view in the analysis. In order to achieve this I invited three research participants, who had expressed keen interest in discussing my findings after being interviewed, to a meeting. There were three former students at the meeting, two of them teachers, and one a social worker. We discussed what I had concluded from the interviews, and they considered the findings to be relevant.

The use of grounded theory enabled me to analyse the interviews with former at-risk students/drop-outs and to generate or discover theory from first-hand data. This revealed what has helped students remain in school and find their path in education and/or the world of work. From this perspective, grounded theory was an efficient methodology because it proved ideal for exploring integral social relationships, the behaviour of the target group under investigation, and the contextual factors that affect individual's lives (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Reflecting on data collection and analysis, it should be mentioned that both were a continuous process that inspired me during the fieldwork to discover relevant elements of the research topic. With limited time and resources available to me during the fieldwork, I was not able to strictly follow Corbin and Strauss's approach to theoretical sampling (e.g. constant analysis which guides data collection continuously), but the main features of this approach were applied. Thus, theoretical sampling was used to generate further data to prove

or reduce categories. For instance, the set of questions slightly changed after the discovery of a new, emerging theme. After the first two interviews it became obvious that the causes of ESL are complex, therefore I should ask questions related to schooling experiences, peer effects and family background. In addition, this realisation made an impact on sampling as well, because I asked the Danish and the Hungarian school staff to put me in contact with former students who had had a variety of reasons for leaving school early. In both cases, we selected students during the fieldwork phase by considering new factors that emerged from the data analysis. There were cases when potential research participants politely refused to take part in my research, therefore we had short discussions with relevant staff members about selecting new participants to contact. In the process of analysis, the coding of data and creation of categories was challenging because I identified approximately 120 categories. To reduce this number, the names of categories were grouped by considering their meaning, which process indicated that there were overlapping categories with the same meaning. The most straightforward element of the analysis was the contextualisation of findings as a clear chronological storyline with three identifiable milestones traceable in each interview; namely, experiences before, during and after second chance education. This division of themes formed the basis of the three chapters about research findings (see Chapters 6, 7 and 8). I believe that a significant advantage of the grounded theory method is that basic social processes can be revealed in the data, which support the researcher's discovery of new knowledge, as well as relations within the research topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

### **3.6 The researcher's role and identity affected the fieldwork**

According to Marshall & Rossman (2010, p.12), the researcher is 'the instrument' of data collection in qualitative research. During my fieldwork, I focussed on building rapport with

the research participants so that they felt comfortable sharing their experiences of school and career. This was mostly linked to private and sometimes emotional topics.

Building trust was easier in Denmark and Hungary than in England for many different reasons. First, the Hungarian and Danish professionals considered me to be a colleague as they had known me for some time through E2C. Second, my extensive knowledge of Paprika City and Øresund City put me in an advantageous position. Being Hungarian was an asset as I shared the same mother tongue, similar cultural background and schooling experiences as the Hungarian research participants. In the case of Øresund City, I was in a good position, too, because I had lived in Denmark for a year, during which I had become accustomed to the Danish way of living, and learnt about Danish culture and the education system. Hence, it was easy to refer to my own experiences or to relate to the interviewees' stories during the interviews.

Being a foreigner both in England and Denmark created a number of advantages. For instance, interviewees with migrant backgrounds shared some of the same experiences in the host country, which made them more open to me. As Ali, a former student from Denmark, said: '... you would not understand this, if you were a Dane ...'. The potential effects of being a foreigner in the field have been examined by a number of researchers (Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Ellen, 1984; Jorgensen, 2011, 2017) who state that foreign researchers are often considered less frightening by young people with a migrant background.

To sum up, my identity and previous professional experience significantly contributed to my being able to gather data at the three fieldwork sites.



### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the methodology used in my doctoral research that incorporated the fact that an empathetic approach should be taken to the target group. To better perceive the subjective dimension of the topic, qualitative research methods were applied to increase the richness and depth of understanding of the participants' stories and reflections on their experiences. First, the qualitative method was informed by Crotty's epistemological framework (1998) because this helped with identifying the relevant methodology (grounded theory) and methods (sampling, qualitative interview, observation). Second, grounded theory was examined, with a description of its main strands and characteristics related to the present research. Third, the main features of theoretical sampling and the challenges faced at the three fieldwork sites were discussed. Fourth, the circumstances of context familiarisation, and moreover, the detailed process of interviewing, was explained. Fifth, the process of data analysis using grounded theory was introduced. As knowledge was created in three different country contexts, thereby making the voices of the research participants heard, the use of qualitative methodology, including grounded theory, was chosen as a suitable research strategy for generating understanding of at-risk students' career choices.

## **Chapter 4 Country context: findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter are introduced the findings of research into policies and measures related to ESL and into the different support and education systems, including career education, career guidance and counselling, in three different national contexts – Denmark, England and Hungary. By generating deeper insight into each country's measures for combatting ESL, we gain an understanding of how different political contexts and discourses influence institutional responses to ESL. According to the country experts interviewed as part of the fieldwork, English and Hungarian measures and practices of combating ESL are influenced – to various extents – by neo-liberal approaches which emphasise the responsibility of individuals to navigate their own career paths under various circumstances (Sultana, 2012). In contrast, Danish policies and measures related to ESL are inspired by the Nordic welfare model, where social rights are universal and involve committed partnerships between individuals and institutions in terms of sharing responsibilities (Alestalo et al., 2009). As an example, in Denmark those professionals who took part in my interviews expressed their commitment to helping young people finish their secondary studies. Many of them emphasised that young people need the proper knowledge, competences and confidence to adapt to the challenges of the volatile labour market. A Danish policy maker described the strong values relating to social engagement as follows:

In Denmark it is particularly important that young people are educated and encouraged to engage with further education, because this way they will have better chances on the labour market. There are very few job opportunities available without education, and if there are any, they are only temporary...Young people must get a chance to feel successful, to improve their self-confidence and believe they have a

future in this society... If we do not help them, there is a risk that young people will turn their back on society, because they might feel that society did them no good ...They might reason: Why should I do anything for society if it did me no good? (Mr. Andersen, from the Education Department)

#### **4.1.1 Country comparisons**

The rationale behind sampling three European countries was to facilitate comparison and contrast of substantially different support systems and national strategies to shed light on policies and examples of good practice for combating ESL (e.g. the role of career counselling, of flexible routes in the education systems, and of cross-sectorial cooperation) in Denmark, England and Hungary. The social consequences of young people leaving education without qualifications, such as youth unemployment, have drawn attention to the potential significant policy importance of ESL. Since ESL is multifaceted, complex measures and policies that target the causes of ESL play an important role in these European countries. In this chapter, descriptions of the country context characteristics and of different measures and policies in each of the three countries are provided. Since it is not feasible to describe in detail all of the measures related to ESL in the three countries under investigation, my analysis focuses on the main characteristics of the policy context which are related to generating an understanding of ESL, such as cross-sectorial cooperation, including agents from the careers services. In the case of career guidance services, the availability of services mostly in primary and secondary education is highlighted (e.g. career education, and how the transition – from primary to secondary – is supported).

To map out the three different country-contexts under study, related literature and data from interviews with (n = 21) policy makers and professionals that were conducted during fieldwork were used.

## 4.2 Denmark

Denmark has established a national target to reduce the rate of ESL to less than 10% by 2020. At the time of writing, this had already been met (it currently stands at 8%). More precisely, the percentage of early leavers from education and training was 11.3% in 2009 compared with 8% in 2013. The percentage of unemployment among early leaving young people aged 16-29 is 8.89% in Denmark, while the youth unemployment rate was 11.6% in 2016 (Cedefop, 2015).

**Table 4.1: Key characteristics of 15-29 year olds in Denmark compared to the EU average (2014)**

Characteristics	Denmark	EU28
<b>Total number of young people (1,000)</b>	1,058	86,874
<b>Share of people aged 15-29 in active population</b>	24.6%	20.2%
Activity rate	67.5%	56.4%
Employment rate	59.8%	46.5%
NEET rate	7.3%	15.3%
Unemployment rate	11.4%	17.5%

Source: Eurofound (2016), Exploring the diversity of NEETs, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Annex, p. 19

To achieve these positive results, Danish policies put huge emphasis on cross-sectorial cooperation, the reform of career guidance and on adaptive routes in education that consider the needs of the individual and the local community.

The Education for All theory contributes significantly to Denmark's competitiveness and increases the opportunity for innovative development. This perspective is actually supported by one of the government's welfare reforms, drafted in 2006, which declared the ambitious goal that by 2010 85%, and by 2015, 95%<sup>2</sup> of all young Danish people complete a youth education programme (equal to the education of secondary educational institutions in Hungary and England) (Madsen, 2010). This ambitious aspiration made the introduction of different policy initiatives necessary, one of which is an increase in the role of career guidance to stimulate young people's participation in education (Plant & Thomsen, 2011; NFF, 2014). In Denmark, guidance is clearly stated to be a measure for reducing ESL (Cedefop, 2015).

Career guidance has a long history in Denmark that can be traced back to the 1880s when the psychometric test was considered a modern approach (Plant, 2009). The current advisory system, which locates young people as the focus, originates from that time. Decades ago, guidance was not referred to as a separate profession, but was provided by teachers who were interested in the topic and who had a reduced number of teaching hours and were able to spend non-teaching hours on this area. A significant turning point occurred in 2004 when the Danish government declared – based on the 'EU Resolution on Lifelong Guidance'<sup>3</sup> – that

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<sup>2</sup> This is the 2011 Government Programme (Et Danmark, der star sammen):

[http://www.stm.dk/publikationer/Et\\_Danmark\\_der\\_staar\\_sammen\\_11/Regeringsgrundlag\\_okt\\_2011.pdf](http://www.stm.dk/publikationer/Et_Danmark_der_staar_sammen_11/Regeringsgrundlag_okt_2011.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Resolution of the Council on Guidance adopted on 28 May 2004

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/resolution-council-guidance-adopted-28-may-2004>

providing career guidance should be a separate, full-time, professional job that requires a degree (Plant & Thomsen, 2011).

On the basis of the reform, guidance counsellors who work at the different centres can obtain a degree in three different areas: a Bachelor's degree in the field of public administration that targets educational and vocational guidance; a Diploma in educational, vocational and career guidance; or a Master's degree in Guidance. The Bachelor's degree and the Diploma that focus on the education of career practitioners in all sectors can be obtained from university colleges, whereas the Master's degree is awarded at DPU, Faculty of Arts, Aarhus University and focusses on research, leadership, development, evaluation and teaching (Plant & Thomsen, 2011). Danish guidance counsellors are taught about a number of theories, mainly person-centred and constructivist approaches. Also of importance is the holistic approach that is adopted during their work (Plant, 2009). Trained guidance counsellors do 'vejledning', which is the Danish term for career counselling; i.e., guiding someone on their way. This covers personal counselling, school counselling, educational and vocational guidance and counselling, career guidance and development, while counsellors also supervise students during their college and university studies (Plant & Thomsen, 2011).

The 2004 EU resolution<sup>4</sup>, which has been adopted by Denmark, determines how the guidance counsellors should lead young people to a state of conformity that is accepted by majority society, where active social participation is based on work and education. From the perspective of social policy, career guidance is thus a soft governance mechanism. However, this mechanism provides little room for alternative options and clearly demonstrates the role

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<sup>4</sup> The 2004 EU Resolution on Lifelong Guidance refers to: 'A range of activities that enables citizens of any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used' (EU, 2004). In this resolution, guidance activities include: information and advice giving, counselling, competence assessment, mentoring, advocacy, teaching decision making, and career management skills (Plant & Thomsen, 2012).

of social control that is present in legislative initiatives such as the Youth Action Programme 2010<sup>5</sup> (Plant, 2010). These legislative packages – ‘Youth Packages’ – specifically target young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years old. The measures formulated in the packages principally target a reduction of youth unemployment through the spending of more money on practice-based opportunities/internship and training and the establishment of job-creation services (Madsen, 2010).

Another important step in the improvement of guidance counselling was that so-called Youth Guidance Counselling Centres<sup>6</sup> (hereafter YGCC) were established. These are independent institutions that employ guidance counsellors. The primary task of the centres is to mentor the transition period from primary to secondary school, and also to familiarise young people with their own aptitudes, interests and opportunities to help them make valid decisions in connection with their education and employment. The target group of these institutions is primarily young people in primary and secondary schools; and second, also secondary school students and those who have dropped out. However, counsellors are specialised at working with diverse age and target groups (e.g. students with special educational needs, and young offenders). Since 2003 – since the policy environment started to focus on this target group – it is more typical that they concentrate on young people who have dropped out, or who are exposed to the risk of dropping-out (Plant, 2013).

Lifelong guidance has been at the centre of attention in policy making in Denmark, a situation that is clearly traceable in everyday practice. There are 48 youth guidance counselling centres in Denmark, covering 98 local governments. After secondary education, students can turn to the seven regional centres, whose main task is to mentor the transition from secondary to higher education (UVM, 2015). It is important to note that counsellors are

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<sup>5</sup> Known as ‘Ungdom Pakke’: The Youth Packages in Education and Employment.

<sup>6</sup> In Danish: ‘Ungdommens Uddannelsesvejledning’.

available not only in the centres and the different educational institutions, but in libraries, youth clubs and employment centres as well, cooperating with other supporting professionals. In addition, teachers' responsibility is the provision of career education (Years 1-9), but the YGCCs provide support in this field. Students attending second chance provisions are guided by the relevant institutional counsellors. In adulthood, there are different training opportunities for learning and improving competencies. Thirteen Centres for Adult Education and Continuing Training (VEU-centre) provide guidance linked with various education programmes. In addition, eGuidance (<https://www.ug.dk/evejledning/eguidance-evejledning>) offers guidance to all Danish citizens via numerous virtual communication channels (UVM, 2015).

Policy measures have changed the characteristics of career guidance in education, so guidance counsellors formally start working with students from Years 6 and 7. Services cannot be chosen voluntarily any more, as they could prior to the Packages, but it is the counsellors' task to take care of those young people to whom they are allocated (Plant, 2010). In practice, at the end of comprehensive school (Folkeskolen), which follows completion of Year 9, based on the form teacher's evaluation and meetings with the student the counsellor prepares a summary. Depending on the individual (e.g. motivation, responsibility), social skills (e.g. cooperation with peers, behaviour) and academic results the counsellor determines the student's state of preparation for transition to secondary education, and also suggests the type of school that would be best for the student. This evaluation is the result of one-and-a-half year's work that starts with the student early in Year 8, and involves discussion of plans for further education that are re-evaluated by the middle of Year 9. Moreover, students can experience a 'taster session' of secondary school and working life for two periods of two weeks (the so called 'Bridge Programme') to help them make decisions at the end of comprehensive school. When individuals are not 'prepared' for the transition to secondary



education, then they can participate in an alternative educational programme (see the subsection on Øresund City).

The other major change after the introduction of the programme packages is that counsellors have to contact those 15-17 year old students who have dropped out for some reason within five days, and find a new form of education or job for them within 30 days. To support the achievement of this important task a national database is available in which details about every student is recorded (because schools, the tax authority, ergo every agent who has been in contact with the student, supply data for this database). Counsellors urge those who have dropped out to return to education. As a first step, the counsellor invites the young person and their families to a meeting where they attempt to modify the educational plan. Then the counsellor keeps track of the young person and, if needed, modifies the plan again.

To sum up, this short review of the Danish career guidance and education system suggests that career guidance follows citizens' needs, ambitions and their transitions to different stages of life to help them become productive and valued members of society.

### **4.3 England**

To reduce the rate of ESL, as part of the National Reform Programme, the United Kingdom has not determined a national quantitative target for reducing the rate of ESL (Janmaat & Hoskins, 2015). However, England has integrated priorities relating to reducing the number of early leavers in its national determination, namely NEETs (Cedefop, 2015). The proportion of early leavers from education and training was 15.7% in 2009, and 12.4 % in 2013. The percentage of early leaving among young people aged 16-29 was 16.6% in 2014

(Cedefop, 2015). The youth unemployment rate in England was 21.6% in 2012 (RESL, 2014).

**Table 4.2: Key characteristics of 15-29 year olds in England compared to EU average (2014)**

Characteristics	England	EU28
<b>Total number of young people (1,000)</b>	12,126	86,874
<b>Share of people aged 15-29 in active population</b>	25.1 %	20.2%
Activity rate	67.5%	56.4%
Employment rate	59.2%	46.5%
NEET rate	13.4%	15.3%
Unemployment rate	12.4%	17.5%

Source: Eurofound (2016), Exploring the diversity of NEETs, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Annex, p.24

In terms of the English policy context, there exist a wide variety of policies, measures and initiatives that have influenced practice. In England, career guidance is clearly stated to be a measure against ESL (Cedefop, 2015). Like Denmark, the development of career guidance in England has a long history, dating back to the two world wars when soldiers, after returning home, needed effective treatment. During this period two associations were established – namely, The British Psychoanalytic Society (in 1924) and the British Association of Psychotherapists (in 1951). Even though the development of counselling was influenced by career guidance, the professional areas of counselling and psychotherapy are now considered more closely related to each other (Bimrose & Hughes, 2013). The former authors note that that “The primary purpose of career counselling is to support individual transitions related to the world of work throughout of the life course” (p.184). In English schools there is a clear

distinction between counselling and career counselling, the former focusing on personal issues, and the latter on the world of work (Bimrose & Hughes, 2013). Before the 1990s, local education authorities had to provide careers guidance across the country through the implementation of common standards and training. In the mid-1990s a profound change involved the privatisation of services. In practice, careers services became private companies or charities that receive funding from the central government. One other profound change was that schools have recently been obliged to provide access to career advice, which has influenced the quality of services (Euroguidance, 2015).

In 2001, a multidisciplinary service (the so-called Connexions service) was launched in England to help smooth the transition from adolescence to adulthood and working life. Research studies about the efficiency of Connexions services have emphasised the services' positive influence on young people (Bimrose et al., 2007; Hughes, 2005). Different policy and strategy developments had a significant influence on Connexions, emphasising greater social inclusion, higher standards, and economic relevance. First, the Educational reform, which defined the framework for improved educational provision in England. This meant more autonomy for schools, more influence for parents and children, and the school leaving age was raised. Second, the National Skills Agenda, which consisted of the government's strategy aiming at boosting the expertise of the workforce. Third, the Curriculum Reform, which aimed at increasing achievement and participation in education. This moreover emphasised a key role for impartial information and advice and guidance (IAG) for young people (Bimrose et al., 2007). In 2005, the Green Paper for Youth (Youth Matters) was published, which declared that: 'All young people should have access to good quality IAG to help them make better career and life choices' (HM Government, 2005, p.44). In addition, to help young people make successful transitions from education to the labour market, they

should have access to good quality career-related education and guidance (CEG) (Bimrose et al., 2007).

Connexions services were responsible for CEG from 2000 to 2006 when they provided career guidance to pupils by giving them up-to-date reference materials and access to personal advisers in maintained schools. According to the Education Act of 1997, CEG was designed to be a statutory part of the curriculum for Years 9, 10 and 11. However, CEG remained outside the national curriculum. Since 2004, a primary target of CEG programmes in schools has been to prepare students for working life (Bimrose et al., 2007). In conclusion, Connexions provided publicly-funded career-related services to young people in 152 Local Authority areas with a particular focus on NEET young people until 2011, when the funding for Connexions services was withdrawn from local authorities. These cutbacks have had a significant impact on the availability of careers services for young people (Careers England, 2015). In addition, it has been challenging to provide access to ‘independent and impartial’ career guidance as sufficient budgetary support has not been available to realise this goal in schools and colleges (Cedefop, 2015).

As part of the fieldwork, one career practitioner (Mrs. Cucumber) explained:

I never said Connexions was perfect...but these services should have been improved rather than closed down...because it was an easy-to-access service for young people...schools were provided with impartial careers guidance...Not to mention that Connexions was a professional nationwide network including multi-disciplinary teams with dedicated professionals.

Indeed, an interview with a senior Danish career expert revealed how Connexions had fascinated him and his colleagues while they were on an expert study visit to England in

2002, as they could learn the main characteristics of a holistic centre, which had given them the impetus and inspiration before the YGCCs were set up in Denmark.

Some local Connexions partnerships still operate using different sources of funding to deliver a range of services (Green, Sissons, Broughton & De Hoyos, 2015). In some areas the local authority and schools have joined together to provide career guidance services through independent companies (Euroguidance, 2015).

In England, responsibility for youngsters' face-to-face services mainly remains in the hands of schools, colleges and local authorities. Education and career guidance can be taught in primary and secondary education if it is organised by the given schools or regional authorities (Cedefop, 2015). Unfortunately, current schools' policies and practices are irregular and contradictory (Hughes & Chambers, 2014). According to the 2011 Education Act,<sup>7</sup> schools are expected to provide independent, impartial careers guidance from September 2012 for students up to 16 years of age. In October 2014, the National Careers Service (NCS) was mandated to expand its offer to schools and colleges (Green et al., 2015).

'In responding to the challenges facing careers provision in England, the Government established the National Careers Service (NCS) in April 2012. It was a joint initiative of the Department of Business Innovation and Skills and the Department of Education and created for the first time an all-age careers service.' (Hughes & Chambers, 2014, p.13)

The National Careers Service provides online (<http://streaming.nationalcareersservice.org.uk/index2.htm>) web and telephone services for all age groups. Only adults are provided with face-to-face services, along with some specifically targeted groups (e.g. people facing redundancy, people with SEND and offenders in custody) (Green et al., 2015). NCS has introduced its service into prisons with a focus on future plans and making links to services in

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<sup>7</sup> The National Archives. Retrived from: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/21/contents/enacted>

the community to help prisoners integrate after imprisonment. More than 2,500 qualified career development experts support adults, in addition to the work of career professionals with young people in educational settings. Some data support the efficiency of NCS: after six months, 76% of adults report making progress in learning or work. Unfortunately, many employers, adults and young people are not informed about the National Careers Service, so there is a need for greater promotion of available services (Hughes & Chambers, 2014).

NCS has cooperated with different agents (e.g. Job Centre Plus, further education colleges, libraries, community centres, mosques, and high street shops) to support the more effective synthesis of the world of work and education (Hughes & Chambers, 2014). The challenges of the volatile labour market demand a number of ‘skills from career development practitioners, so the role is now to facilitate, guide, coach, mentor and support, where necessary’ (Hughes & Chambers, 2014, p.19). Regarding expertise, career practitioners can obtain a qualification at many different levels. According to the Career Development Institute’s website,<sup>8</sup> the following opportunities exist: Qualification in Career Guidance/Development; Certificate in Career Guidance Theory; Master’s degrees, Postgraduate Diplomas and Postgraduate Certificates (e.g. in Warwick, Kingston, East London, Liverpool, Canterbury, Derby); Post Graduate level CPD; Certificate in Career Leadership; and QCF Qualifications.

The literature and interview transcripts that were reviewed suggest that in England career guidance should be more personalised at the early stages of life, or more precisely, during the time of transition from primary to secondary, and from secondary to higher education, with special attention to at-risk students. Considering the changes in the English policy context related to ESL around 2010 – when cutbacks to public services were made –some other relevant policy measures were launched. One of them was the raising of the participation age

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.thecdi.net/>.

(RPA). This was considered significant for combatting ESL by stimulating future participation in upper secondary education. The minimum leaving age was raised to 17 from September 2013, and to 18 from September 2015, meaning that young people are obliged to remain in full-time education, an apprenticeship, or a part-time course if in employment (Janmaat & Hoskins, 2015) until that time.

The other measure, which negatively affected ESL, was the cancellation of Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in 2010. In 2004, when it was introduced, EMA supported young people from low-income families to boost their participation in upper secondary education. This was replaced with a £180 bursary scheme that was paid to educational institutions, not directly to families, like EMA. This policy change was criticised for depriving students with low socio-economic status of sufficient financial support to continue their education (Janmaat & Hoskins, 2015).

In 2011, youth services that mainly deal with disadvantaged young people also experienced cutbacks, and according to the Education Select Committee (2011) youth workers had to become entrepreneurial and independent. This austerity measure has reduced the number of youth services and youth workers in the last five years (St. Croix, 2016).

Another relevant policy development related to higher education was the raising of tuition fees. In 2010, according to the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance, tuition fees were increased from £3,000 to £9,000 a year, causing large student protests in London (Lewis et al., 2010). As a result of this, the number of young people entering higher education has declined (Janmaat & Hoskins, 2015).

In conclusion, since 2010 England has experienced severe cut-backs to public services, and young adults between the age of 16 and 19 are most affected. It is a worrying fact that cuts to funding in key areas (e.g. education, schools, colleges – including further education colleges

–, careers services and youth services) may very well undermine the overall goal of preparing young people for the labour market (RESL, 2015).

#### 4.4 Hungary

Hungary has established a national target for the ESL rate; namely, that it should be reduced to 10% by 2020. Unfortunately, the rate has been rising over the last six years. More precisely, the percentage of early leavers from education and training was 11.2% in 2009 and 11.8% in 2013 (Cedefop, 2014), while in 2014 it was 12.2% (KSH, 2014). The percentage of early leaving among young people aged 16-29 is 8.9%. The youth unemployment rate is 28.1% in 2013 (Cedefop, 2014).

**Table 4.3: Key characteristics of 15-29 year olds in Hungary compared to EU average (2014)**

Characteristics	Hungary	EU28
<b>Total number of young people (1,000)</b>	1,725	86,874
<b>Share of people aged 15-29 in active population</b>	18.4%	20.2%
Activity rate	47.3%	56.4%
Employment rate	40.8%	46.5%
NEET rate	16.4%	15.3%
Unemployment rate	13.9%	17.5%

Source: Eurofound (2016), Exploring the diversity of NEETs, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Annex, p.31.

In terms of the Hungarian policy context, there exist a wide variety of policies, measures and initiatives that have not been fully implemented, but have influenced practice. Career



guidance is provided, but not clearly as a measure to combat ESL (Cedefop, 2015). Lifelong guidance in the Hungarian education system dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, when two governmental decrees were introduced in 1961(1027/1961. XII.30) and in 1971 (1029/1971). These measures specified the first legal framework for career guidance. As a result, the National Careers Advice and Guidance Institute (NCAGI) and the National Career Committee were established (Priczinger et al., 2009). From the professional perspective, this system followed international trends (e.g. German and French) by developing new methods and tools and publishing a journal called Career Counselling for 10 years. At the county level, there were 20 Career Guidance Centres where multi-disciplinary teams, including professionals such as psychologists, SEND teachers, teachers and economists, worked together. Career professionals from the centres went to schools, but unfortunately, they could not reach every student (Borbély-Pecze, 2010).

The NCAGI was merged with the National Pedagogical Institute in 1981, and in parallel the regional centres were integrated into regional educational advisory centres. In practice, this caused the disappearance of the independent, nationwide professional network, which has never been replaced. The Career Guidance Centre for the capital city survived until 2007, so that was the last institute with dedicated professionals to focus only on career advice and guidance (Priczinger et al., 2009). The number of career guidance professionals decreased and significant differences emerged between counties in terms of service provision (Borbély-Pecze, 2008). According to the 15/2013 (II.26) Decree of the Ministry of Human Capacities 26§, the number of professionals in these services is as follows: in the capital city there are ten career professionals, in each average county there are three career practitioners, and in bigger counties there are five professionals, which means that there are 76 career practitioners in the whole country that give career advice and counselling to young people. In

comparison, there are 120-130 guidance counsellors in the Youth Guidance Centre of Øresund City, which has about half the population of Paprika City.

Career education and guidance policies have been incorporated into different legal documents such as the National Curriculum since 1995, and in the Act of Public Education since 1993. For instance, in the National Curriculum career education is part of the ‘Lifestyle and Practical Skills’ subject. These policies made schools, teachers and pedagogical advisory centres responsible for career education and guidance. The small number of career practitioners in the pedagogical centres and their lack of professional knowledge about career counselling (their professional background is mainly psychology) have made this service symbolic and accessible only to some informed parents and their children. The career guidance activities in these centres mainly involve testing the skills, abilities and the orientation of students with a view to identifying study pathways (15/2013 (II.26) Decree of the Ministry of Human Capacities). According to the same decree, career guidance can be delivered by the following professionals: psychologists, teachers, or teachers trained in guidance. Before 2015, a number of Degree and Master’s courses in pedagogy and adult pedagogy related to lifelong guidance were available, but according to the changes in the Act on Higher Education in 2015 these courses were closed down from September 2016 (Act on HE, 2015). As a main source of career development, the ‘Career Path Counselling’ programme may be mentioned which has been a part of the Social Renewal Operational Programme<sup>9</sup>. The programme is delivered through group work and practical training over a three-day period (Hughes, 2015).

Borbély-Pecze (2010) argues that the quality, volume and content of career education and information/guidance should be judged neither through the statistics related to education nor on the basis of *The Report on Hungarian Public Education*. In addition, the number of career

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<sup>9</sup> Known as SROP-2.2.2-12/1

practitioners is also hard to estimate as there are no data available about how many of the trained career practitioners remain at different schools. The common practice in most schools is that career education and guidance is symbolic, and form teachers are responsible for giving career advice through a few targeted sessions (e.g. by introducing secondary education to Year 8 students – this is the last year of primary education before the transition to secondary). The real challenge is that most of the form teachers lack specific training in career education, and they are awarded neither teaching hours nor any extra payment for undertaking this important task (Borbély-Pecze, 2010). During a research interview, a Hungarian expert (Mr Maszat) stated that:

Most students and parents are under-informed about secondary education. Usually, the former teacher informs Year 8 students about the three main types of secondary education in one or two sessions. Some parents cannot easily distinguish between the different types of vocational education...

Unfortunately, impartial and independent career guidance is lacking for students at the end of their primary education before the transition to secondary education. In contrast, in the early 1990s the first National Curriculum (1995) specified ‘career orientation’ as an area of teaching, so schools increasingly employed career guidance counsellors (Borbély-Pecze, 2008).

At the end of secondary education, students, parents and some dedicated form teachers use the National Webportal on Higher Education (<https://www.felvi.hu>), which is a very informative website containing detailed information about universities, other higher education institutions, careers advice, etc. Students can communicate with career professionals via email, telephone and face-to-face meetings. The majority of universities offer career services, including assisting students in planning their career during and after their studies (Cedefop, 2015). Adults can turn to the Labour Departments of their County

Government Offices to get information about training and/or opportunities in the labour market, or they can use the National Guidance Portal (Euroguidance, 2015).

One important turning point in the development of lifelong guidance was the Social Renewal Operational Programme (SROP - 2.2.2 - 12/1), which was carried out in two stages (Developing a Lifelong Guidance System in Hungary 2008-2011 and 2012-2015). The programme put emphasis on various services and tools applied in career counselling, one of which was the launch of the National Guidance Portal in 2010 (the first version of the portal: <https://palyaorientacio.munka.hu/>; and the new portal: <https://palyaorientacio.munka.hu/>) (Hughes, 2015).

The Social Renewal Operational Programme (SROP - 2.2.2 -12/1) was linked to a number of other strategic initiatives such as: SROP-3.3.12-12-2013-0001 – New Generation<sup>10</sup>. The New Generation Project ran from 2013 to 2015 and set up contact offices in every region where the team provided career guidance and maintained close links with some selected schools (Hughes, 2015).

There exist, however, some good initiatives that have been successful in Hungary. For example, during my phase of fieldwork in Hungary (June 2015) I went into the main street of Buda and noticed two fancy windows decorated with bright colours. I stopped to read the short notes, posters and look at the opening hours, and then realised I was in front of a contact office. I went inside, immediately introducing myself and providing my business card to justify that I was a researcher. The leader of the contact office introduced herself to me. She was proud to report that their project was successful, and that they had met so many young people; they had gone to schools to teach career education classes and to train teachers, and they had maintained good contact with them. In the meantime, she added with disappointment that the project would end in August 2015 because EU funding was only

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<sup>10</sup> [http://ujnemzedek.hu/sajtoszoba/a\\_projektrol-3049](http://ujnemzedek.hu/sajtoszoba/a_projektrol-3049)

available until that point. She also told me that although they would have to close the office, they had been promised that the government might invest some money in the project to enable it to continue from September 2015, and they expected other funding as well. In addition, she raised her concerns about losing those young people who visited the office on a regular basis. Recently, I returned to the office and it was still closed – no decoration, no colours, no helpful women inside – just a deserted office. This illustrates the disadvantage of project-based Hungarian good practices, developments and initiatives that, despite their great achievements and efficiency, cannot be sustainable without government subsidies.

Another project-based initiative, the Springboard (Dobbantó) Programme, was designed to reduce the high dropout rate at Hungarian vocational schools, which was as high as 30-35% after 2005. This nationwide programme was initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture for the years 2008-2011. The programme was created to help 15 participating schools establish manifold and personalised systems of services based on customised education plans for dropouts. Springboard provided an extra year (Year 9) in schools to give those affected a second chance to follow their desired careers according to their specific needs; so, a chance to return to first chance education (any type of secondary education), or to enter into employment. Within the one academic year students spent in the programme, they acquired communicative, learning and social competences. As part of the competence-based curriculum, key attention was given to improving employability skills and to building a bridge to the world of work; i.e., laying the foundations of career building, and job-shadowing (RESL, 2014). It should be mentioned, however, that the conservative government regarded the programme as expensive, so funding was discontinued after 2011 when the project finished and Springboard was not integrated into the education system. The programme has been disseminated in a number of EU member countries since 2011 (Schmitsek, 2012). Even though the curriculum of Springboard created the basis of the

Bridge I<sup>11</sup> and II<sup>12</sup> programmes, it did not involve any changes in the teaching-learning environment and the methods teachers use to motivate at-risk students. Policy makers from the government consider the Bridge programmes to be effective compensatory measures for at-risk students. Unfortunately, according to statistics, the dropout rate is also high in these programmes (RESL, 2014; Martonfi, 2014).

The literature and evidence from the interview transcripts suggest that, in Hungary, career services and courses for career professionals need significant improvement to provide Hungarian citizens with sufficient career advice and guidance to help them find their pathways in the unstable Hungarian economy and to make them feel valued by society. In terms of career education and guidance for young people, services should be more personalised at early stages of life, or more precisely, at the time of the transition from primary to secondary, and from secondary to higher education with special attention to at-risk students. In summary, Hungarian lifelong career guidance needs more time and effort to become professionalised. The main changes in Hungarian education related to the issue of ESL are outlined next.

Since 2010, the regulative background of public education institutions has been significantly changed by the conservative government. In 2013, schools managed by local governments have been taken under direct control of the state, thus decision-making powers have been taken away. In practice, school autonomy has been eliminated, making schools less responsive to local challenges and problems (RESL, 2014).

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<sup>11</sup> A one-year preparatory programme with career orientation for students who finish primary education but are not admitted to secondary school. This helps students prepare for the entrance examination to upper-secondary education.

<sup>12</sup> A one-year catch-up programme with intensified career orientation for students aged 15 or over who have finished primary school but who have completed six years of schooling, this provides a partial qualification (ISCED 2C) that is a step towards obtaining the more significant qualifications needed to enter VET or the labour market.

In opposition to European trends, the Hungarian government reduced the minimum school-leaving age from 18 to 16 years in 2012<sup>13</sup>, which created the opportunity to get rid of ‘problematic’ students when they turn 16 years of age. Unfortunately, this tendency can be identified in primary education (as grade repetition is a common practice, many problematic students turn 16 before completing the 8<sup>th</sup> grade). According to statistics from the Ministry of Human Capacity, the proportion of truancy in the primary sector has significantly increased: in 2012-2013 it was 5,165 students, while in 2014-15 6,000 students were at risk of dropping out (Farkas, 2016).

The other negative tendency is the rise in the number of mainly disadvantaged young people who leave the education system at the age of 16 without qualifications. This claim is underpinned by data about public work. In 2013, the number of young public workers (younger than 18 years) was 101, in 2014 it was 568, and in 2015 it had reached 1,123 (Farkas, 2016). According to the response of a research participant during their interview, youngsters from disadvantaged families voluntarily choose to enter public work at the age of 16 because they can earn some money (approximately 140 EUR per month) and contribute to the income of their households. The respondent also expressed his fear that this pathway for disadvantaged young people leads nowhere, as without qualifications and effective employability skills they find it extremely challenging to find jobs. In addition, the number of students in VET decreased: in 2012-2013 139,400 students attended VET, while in 2013-2014 only 97,300 students obtained a qualification in VET (KSH, 2014).

In conclusion, the Hungarian government has, since 2010, implemented legal changes and measures throughout the entire education system, which have resulted in an increase in the dropout rate, and have put increasing pressure on young people. It is worrying that cutbacks and measures that go ‘against European trends’ that have been introduced in key areas might

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.mzmsz.hu/dokumentumok/2012/nefmi\\_cxc\\_tajekoztato\\_06.pdf](http://www.mzmsz.hu/dokumentumok/2012/nefmi_cxc_tajekoztato_06.pdf)

significantly undermine the overall goals of preparing young people for the labour market (RESL, 2014).

## **4.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, policies and measures related to ESL in the three countries under study have been described, focusing on the different support systems, including career education, career guidance and counselling. By generating deeper insight into the country's measures to combat ESL, we can see how different political contexts influence everyday practice.

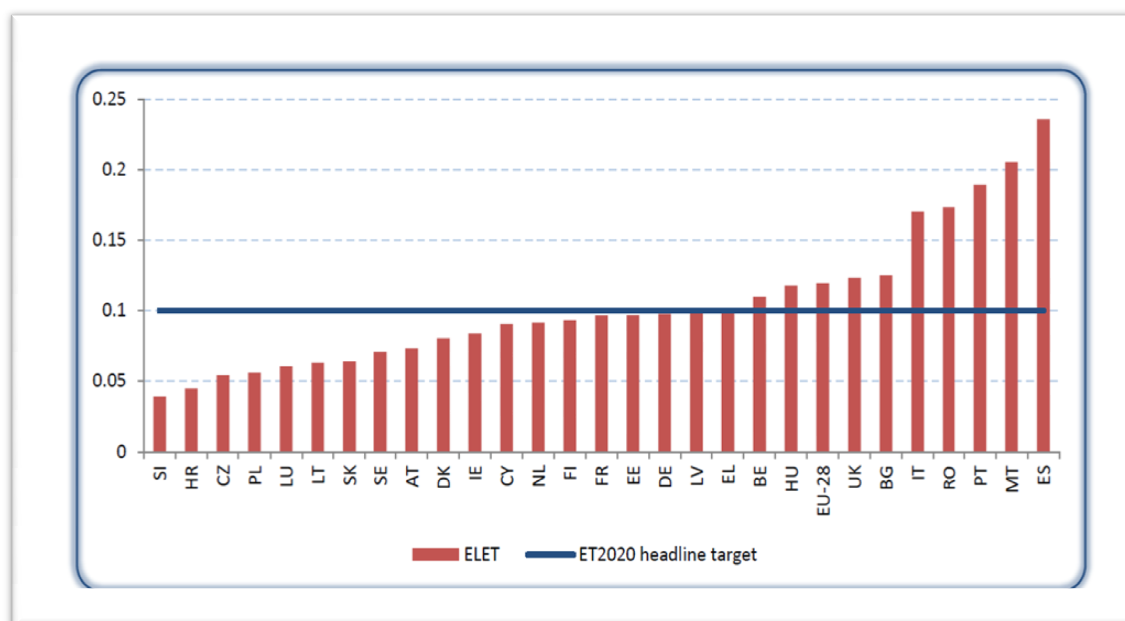
In England and Hungary, where measures and practices for combating ESL are influenced by neo-liberal approaches – to various extents – some significant issues emerge from the support systems. For instance, a lack of face-to-face or ad-hoc impartial professional career guidance can be experienced in the phase of transition from initial education to secondary. In both countries, schools are responsible for career education and career guidance, but typically lack money and the relevant professional knowledge, while in Denmark, policies and measures related to ESL are inspired by the Nordic welfare model, so the state has extensive influence over the welfare arrangements. The Danish lifelong guidance system is fully subsidised by the government with established, easy-to-access institutions. Regarding ESL, the most important institutions are the Youth Guidance Centres which control the transition from initial to secondary education; in practice, each student's transition is supported by an impartial guidance counsellor. Facts and figures about the three countries underpin the effectiveness of a support system subsidised by the state, as according to the statistics the Danish model is more effective than those of England and Hungary.



**Table 4.4: Summary of facts and figures about the three countries under analysis**

Countries under study	Rate of ESL (Cedefop, 2015)	Percentage of early leaving among young people aged 16-29 (Cedefop, 2015)	Youth unemployment rate (RESL, 2014)
Denmark	8%	8.89%	11.6%
England	12.4%	16.58%	21.6%
Hungary	12.2%	14.89%	28.1%

**Figure 4.1: Proportion of ELET in population aged 18-24**



Source: Flisi S., Goglio V., Meroni C. & Toscano, V. (2015): *School-to-work transition of young individuals: what can the ELET and NEET indicators tell us?* JRC Technical Report. European Commission. JRC, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. p. 6.

Finally, it seems clear from these comparative data that societies where welfare and social security systems are stable, and ‘citizen-friendly’ measures that support young people are in

place, they are effective at helping students find the right pathway in education and/or in the world of work, and moreover, to avoid failure in their careers.

## **Chapter 5 Local context: findings**

### **5.1 Introduction**

A fundamental assumption of this research is that reducing ESL can enhance the integration of young people into the labour market. More specifically, the aim of this research is to explore the narratives of ‘success’ from the perspectives of former students who were at risk of dropping out and/or who had dropped out of secondary education in three different national contexts. Those participating in the research attended different second chance provisions where – according to the former students’ interviews – they acquired self-efficacy and career adaptability, which led them to continue their careers in further or higher education and/or the labour market. The three field sites chosen for this research represent different forms of second chance programmes. In general, second chance programmes operate with new educational curricula and teaching methods that supplement the traditional school system in order to entice young people to return to the field of knowledge and acquire skills in an environment from which they have been alienated. A number of authors have defined the principles of the second chance provision (Brynaa & Johansen, 2010; Cresson et al., 1995; EC, 2001; Lafond & Termsette, 1999) as follows:

- Such schools have supportive staff; they provide psycho-social support and intensified career guidance;
- They give an insight into theoretical and practical education within which students can obtain professional and social competences, employability skills, and discover the world of work (e.g. through interviews with employers, or visits to different workplaces);
- Pedagogical methods are characterised by innovation, flexibility and personalisation, as well as developing the skill of ‘learning how to learn’;

- Students should respect school rules and obligations, others and themselves, as well as feeling that they are part of a community;
- Programmes apply so-called ‘active pedagogy’ methods, so students explore cognition, and they also take responsibility for their own studying;
- Models of study and evaluation are based on success-oriented pedagogy with the goal of strengthening the sense of efficiency.

The design and delivery of second chance provision is complex, as providers are seeking solutions to multi-faceted educational and social problems and are influenced by local context and national policy (Cresson et al., 1995; EC, 2001; Lafond&Termsette, 1999). In line with this situation, the interview data from different stakeholders (teachers and other professionals involved in inter-agency work) in this research illustrate how second chance schools create networks with support organisations and employers in their local contexts. Therefore, it is important to outline the three different local contexts and the mechanisms at play to understand how second chance provision operates in each of the country contexts under study.

## **5.2 The three local contexts – Øresund City, Paprika City and Grey Town**

In this section, the main characteristics of each local context, namely Øresund City, Paprika City, and Grey Town are described with emphasis given to significant differences and similarities regarding the function and role of each second chance provision. Through the eyes of the stakeholders involved in second chance provision, and those of former students, the narratives of ‘success’ are explored by emphasising the characteristics of each institution in the local context to highlight the good practices which have led young people back to the field of knowledge and skills acquisition. It should be noted that students from each country

considered attending these institutions to be a turning point in their search for a pathway, and that they had helped them to avoid failures in their careers. To protect the privacy of the research participants, the real names of the three cities and the three educational institutions are obscured in the thesis.

### **5.2.1 The Danish local context – Øresund City**

Øresund City is a populous and prosperous city in Denmark with a vibrant cultural life. According to one of the policy makers, the city has a well-structured education system that encourages young people to engage in community development and community building.

In introducing the local context, the school system is first described. Compulsory school attendance lasts nine years (UVM, 2015). After kindergarten, most children attend the ‘Folkeskole’, a comprehensive institution supported by the local government. The school involves nine years of primary and lower-secondary education, while a tenth year is optional. At the end of Year 9, students take an exam that qualifies them to enter secondary school. Upper secondary education primarily consists of the general secondary, high-school level programmes (Gymnasium: STX, HHX, HTX) and vocational training programmes at different levels. These forms of education are flexible and easily interoperable (UVM, 2015).

In finding pathways for young people after comprehensive school, the Youth Guidance Centre of Øresund (hereafter, YGCØ), which was established by the municipality, plays a significant role. There are approximately 120-130 guidance counsellors working at the centre. The director of the centre reported in the interview that they have an intensive professional relationship with the municipality; they inform them about their activities and also supply data that help the municipality to use state resources more effectively as regards the

development of education and related services. These actions contribute to enhancing retention rates within the comprehensive education system and making it more effective.

Besides taking on the compulsory tasks listed in the previous section, the centre also cooperates with other organisations to help young people in other ways. One of the cooperative institutions is the job centre where the guidance counsellor works on a weekly basis to prepare personalised plans. It is important to note that young people can turn to the job centre from the age of 18 and can request unemployment benefit. One of the counsellors who was interviewed reported that young people make less use of this option as they prefer to search for other alternatives. However, it might be more appealing for young people to choose education, because from the age of 18 if they are registered as students at any upper-secondary or higher educational programme they receive SU (the Danish government's student grant), which is a fixed monthly amount ranging between 2000-5000 DKK (the amount depends on whether the student lives with their family or on their own). Students receive SU until they finish their upper-secondary and/or higher educational studies (UVM, 2015). However, if an unemployed young person feels that they are ill prepared to return to education, with the help of the counsellor they can find a temporary workplace, reported another interviewee.

The career guidance centre's holistic approach is demonstrated by the fact that different sectors cooperate to effectively solve young people's complex problems. Besides the job centre and the social services, the centre works closely with the police. The prevention and handling of juvenile delinquency is part of the local government's mandated remit. Therefore, a defined form of cooperation – so-called SSP – between schools, social services and the police is well-established. Additionally, there is a counsellor in the guidance centre

who is the head of SSP and specialises in helping students who already have a bad record or are at risk. One guidance counsellor reported about this job that:

Yes, SSP helps a lot, because it is very important that all participants cooperate to find a solution for crime prevention...it is especially hard to help those who are part of a gang and want to break out...for this, we have a particular solution called EXIT which means we move the young person to a place where gang members cannot find him while we help him to return to active life again. Another difficult task is to convince those who traffic drugs [to stop], as the amount of SU I can offer is nowhere near the amount they earn by dealing. Nevertheless, I feel that any effort is much more effective since we work together with the SSP participants. (Mr Sams)

Another duty of the SSP counsellors is to support school attendance and the progress of young offenders who are under the age of 18, as the latter may stay in an institution reserved for juvenile delinquents, but during the day are allowed to go to school.

In addition to the institutions mentioned above, the guidance centre, following a holistic approach, also cooperates with psychologists, pedagogical centres, dyslexia centres and psychiatric institutions to deal with students' multi-faceted problems. Many of the counsellors I interviewed confirmed that they have a good relationship with every institution, especially with the schools. Lastly, there is another forum for cooperation between YGCØ and all secondary educational institutions, including the schools of the Øresund Youth School System (hereafter YSS), which is a major professional event<sup>14</sup>. During this event the aforementioned schools and co-workers of the YGCØ introduce themselves to 9<sup>th</sup> grade students to support them with their career decisions.

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<sup>14</sup> This takes the form of an open professional forum that is held in the second half of November of every year. It takes place in Copenhagen's biggest concert hall, the Forum Copenhagen.

## 5.2.2 Øresund Youth School System

The YSS is part of the preventive and comprehensive measures used to combat ESL in Øresund. Youth Schools have had a long tradition in Denmark – since the Second World War, when it was codified into law that every local government must have a youth school. The aim was to keep young people off the streets after school to support them to become responsible citizens in Danish society.

The organisation's profile changed from the mid-1990s onwards when the two main educational structures were formed; extra-curricular, and full-time education. YSS is a key player in the educational scene, as it has become a coherent system. It also represents one possible approach to supporting young people. The emergence of this approach was influenced by the commitment to the E2C; as the director of YSS reported, they have adapted the second chance conception to reflect the fact that 'every person's desire is to get a second chance'.

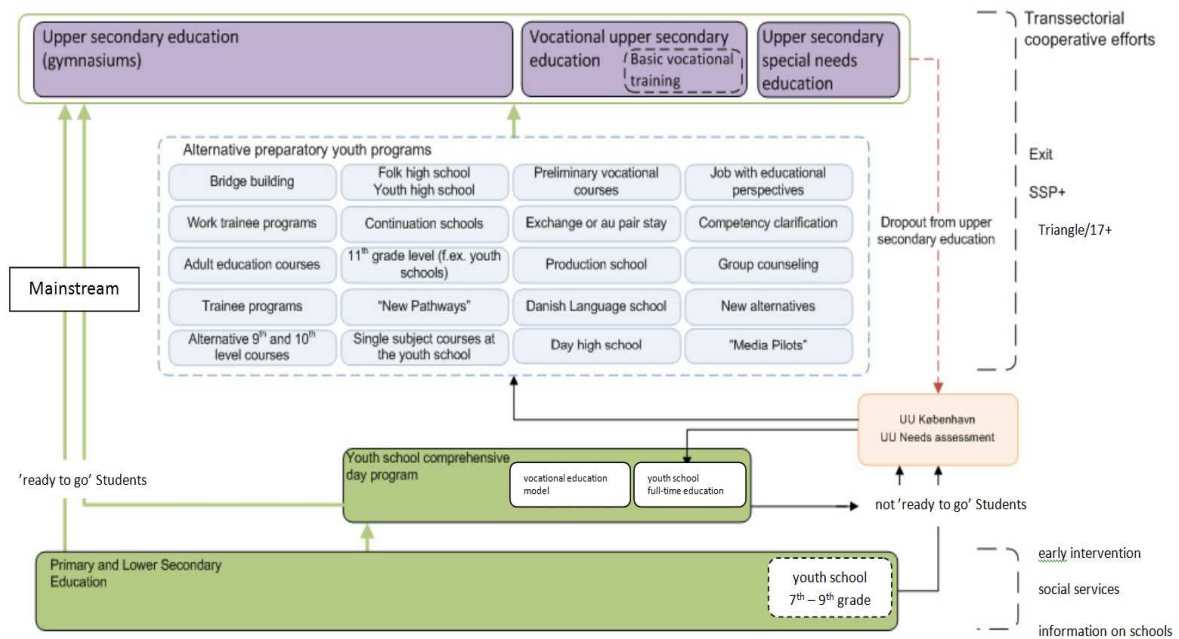
The operation of the youth school is the responsibility of local government, who strive to take care of those young people who are not ready for the transition to a higher school level after comprehensive school, or who have dropped out. Besides the youth school network, there are other institutional initiatives for addressing this issue. There are three institutional initiatives: basic vocational training programmes, Year 10, and Produktionsskole – a school that focuses on creating and selling one type of 'product'<sup>15</sup>. The figure below illustrates the institutional network that helps the transition from lower secondary education to upper secondary education, and also shows the cooperation between the sectors:

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<sup>15</sup> Students spend a half/one full year at this school working in smaller groups on a project/product that is made to an external partner's order. Students negotiate about the product's parameters with the partner and also agree on the price. These projects are complemented with intensive career planning counselling and support for self-improvement; moreover, in the framework of 'Bridge Building' young people can visit different secondary schools and workplaces to facilitate their career choices.



**Figure 5.1: Transition from lower secondary education to upper secondary education**



Source: Brynaa, power point presentation slide 5 (2010).

As demonstrated, there is an entire spectrum of educational possibilities for young people. Employees at YSS launch programmes with new educational content and methods to supplement the traditional school system with the goal of motivating young people. YSS's alternative school programmes include extra-curricular education and full-time education. The programme for full-time education comprises:

- New Pathways** (approximately 30 students): young people between the age of 15 and 21 who have lost their contact with the school system long before due to their school failures spend six months or one year here. This programme focusses on the development of social and personal competences (for more details, see below, 5.2.2.1).
- Support School** (approximately 120 students): this has three creative courses, such as music, art and design (for more details, see below, 5.2.2.2).

c) Years 8 and 9: students who have dropped out (14-17 years) or are at risk attend this school for two years. The school was launched in 2007 as part of the local government's crime prevention programme package<sup>16</sup>.

d) Daily course (approximately 120 students): this is a course for dropouts (students who could not finish their lower secondary education) between the age of 15 and 19. In this course, they are supported to take exams at the end of Year 9. There is a teacher-student ratio of 12:2 in every class, and the two-teacher model is employed.

e) Language School (approximately 90 students): school for foreign-language-speaking students who are helped to acquire the Danish language and to start their education in Denmark.

f) U-Turn (12-13 students): a centre combined with a school<sup>17</sup>, which employs a multidisciplinary team with a holistic view. It is aimed at students (aged between 14-25 years) who use light drugs and who have voluntarily turned to the institution to quit them. Students at this centre can complete their lower secondary education.

According to my analysis, the Øresund Youth School System model is a good example of how students who have withdrawn from the mainstream school system can be helped through their integration into second chance school and society. Their strategy appears to be effective because the institutions are differentiated according to the young people's needs.

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<sup>16</sup> The target group of this programme includes students who have dropped out from primary school due to constant absences, and whose parents characteristically do not cooperate with the school. Successful applicants to the programme must meet different criteria. Both students and parents are required to fulfil expectations which are included in a contract that both must approve and accept.

<sup>17</sup> Only the U-Turn school that employs four teachers for 12 students (14-18 years) belongs to YSS. Students spend usually 6-8 months here, and they not only catch up, but follow a special weekly routine that consists of one-to-one conversations with professionals and therapeutic group activities. They also learn how to have a healthy lifestyle, eat healthily, and participate in sports. There are therapeutic groups for parents as well, where they can share their problems.

The following section provides a detailed account of two full-time programmes where most of the interviews and observations undertaken as part of this research were made.

#### **5.2.2.1 New Pathways**

Co-workers at New Pathways and the Support School constitute one professional team, in spite of the fact that the two schools are located in two different locations in the city (until 2014, the two schools were in buildings located next to each other).

Students who are here (aged between 15-21 years) come for different reasons (addiction, association with a gang, psychological problems, difficulties related to study, behaviour and integration) but have been completely alienated from the school system. Accordingly, this type of institution focusses primarily on the development of social and personal competences, instead of the study of specific subjects. In this way, they try to integrate young people into the world of school or work.

Students come to this institution and usually spend half a year (a few of them only stay for part of one year), during which time they receive intensive guidance counselling. Groups usually consist of approximately 14-15 students. Students are also able to participate in learning activities outside the premises, such as visiting libraries, museums and theatres, thus they are engaged in more unconventional ways than at the educational structures they rejected, and which led to their departure from the education system. Students are supported by dedicated staff – namely, seven teachers and two guidance counsellors, and some part-time co-workers as well (e.g. a psychologist and yoga teacher).

### 5.2.2.2 Support School

*‘The school of graffiti and equality’* – as it was described by most of the students in response to the question what the institution meant to them.

Support School was established at the end of the 1990s and launched creative-themed Years 10 (drama, photo-film, design, art, music) for students who had finished Year 9, but were not ready yet to start secondary education or who had dropped out. During these years – especially since the establishment of Youth Programme Packages – the number of creative classes was reduced, as in the Danish educational system the importance of subject knowledge came to the fore. Therefore, in 2010, two more classes were made available:

1. Young people who have fallen behind and/or are failing in several subjects (Danish, Mathematics, English) make take one of the classes. The first semester focuses mainly on team-building and the development of self-confidence, so students can feel that ‘they matter, indeed’ (Teacher, DK).
2. The second class accepts students aged 17-24 years to prepare them, over a six-month period, for taking the exam that closes Year 10. For many, this is the last chance to get into secondary education. As the young people chose this programme voluntarily, they are extremely determined to perform well, as described in the narratives of a number of interviewees.

Students of the creative classes have 16 lessons per week in their chosen specialisation, while for the remaining time they attend English, Danish and Mathematics lessons (see some images in Appendix 2). Every student group consists of a maximum of 15 students, and they have lessons from 9.00am to 2.30pm.

Due to the school's holistic nature, the creative learning-teaching process is complemented with intensive guidance counselling. There are two guidance counsellors in this institution. The school considers contact with parents to be important, so beside the usual talks and office hours, they are invited to different events. One of these events is the 'Parents' Evening' where every programme is introduced through different shows or exhibitions. The principal reported that generally they have good relationships with the parents. Regarding students' opinions about the school, interviews with alumni highlight that they found the school's strength to be the teacher-student relationships, other interpersonal relations (peers, friends, and school support staff), and the feeling of care and the experience of belonging to a community (see more detail in Chapter 6).

Last, it is clear that the basic objective of these full-time programmes is to help students pass the exams that are important for their further studies, or that facilitate the process of finding employment. Every student at YSS is given an individual educational plan, in which education and counselling-related contents are determined by the student's needs. Teachers there consider it their mission to develop students and help them progress. The individual study pathways and the limited class size of the programmes enable students to catch up, and to obtain/improve their social skills and competences (Schmitsek, 2010). In addition, YSS programmes make an important contribution to achieving the ambitious 95% graduation rate from secondary school. The director of YSS reported that 85-95% of students from their programmes continue with their education.

### **5.3 The Hungarian local context – Paprika City**

Paprika City is a populous and historical city in Hungary, with an inspiring cultural life combined – as one of the policy makers stated – with a selective education system. The

education system is mainly characterised by early tracking, grade repetition (students have to choose a secondary study pathway at the age of 14), rigid study pathways (secondary forms of education are not flexible and interoperable) and limited cross-sectorial cooperation for dealing with young people's issues and problems (RESL, 2014). Unfortunately, impartial and independent career guidance is lacking for students at the end of primary education before the transition to secondary education (Borbely-Pecze, 2010). In addition, Hungarian good practices, developments and initiatives related to ESL and lifelong guidance are mostly project-based, so despite the great achievements and efficiency of specific projects, sustainability cannot be achieved without government subsidies.

Regarding the fact that cross-sectorial cooperation is patchy, educational institutions and teachers take over some tasks of the government or local authority with regard to solving students' problems by providing extra-curricular activities that have no funding from the government. In addition, some dedicated primary and secondary schools work with students who do not fit into mainstream education for a number of reasons (such as SEND, behavioural problems, or talents). These schools were mostly founded in the early 1990s when the National Curriculum (1989; 1995) provided the legal framework for schools that are managed by foundations and implement an alternative curriculum. Financial support from the government mainly covers the teachers' salaries, so the maintenance of the buildings and any additional expenses have to be covered by alternative funding sources. Unfortunately, the ambiguous access to financial resources creates uncertainty in these institutions. The solid knowledge base they have accumulated in the last 25 years could be more effectively disseminated to mainstream education if they received more stable financial support from the government. As one of the founders (Mr Paradiksom) of Helping School stated:

Yes, these good practices on how to deal with youngsters in secondary education would be more than essential as mainstream teachers feel helpless when they meet challenging youth ... we could provide them with training programmes focusing on person-centred methods and attitude.

Other experts and students who were interviewed for this research effort also recognised that this approach would be beneficial in mainstream education for a number of reasons. For instance, normal teacher training programmes do not prepare teachers to work with challenging youth.

In Paprika City, the situation of institutions that work with at-risk youth is precarious, and there is limited cross-sectorial cooperation between the agents concerned, such as mainstream schools, pedagogical centres and social services. According to the principal, last year's (2013) statistics showed that more than 60% of young people who intended to attend Helping School were informed about this opportunity by peers from their own subculture, not through any institutional channels.

In conclusion, it can be stated that it is possible to identify some good practices related to ESL and at-risk youth in the alternative educational scene in the last 20-25 years, but uncertain funding has not helped these institutions stabilise their position. Furthermore, sustainable centres for helping young people, like youth centres and/or guidance centres (subsidised by the government), have not been founded in places where youngsters and professionals who are in need can turn to for help. The current government has since 2010 launched legal changes and measures throughout the entire education system that have resulted in an increase in the number of dropouts (RESL, 2014). It is therefore suggested that more emphasis should be put on developing and supporting holistic institutional approaches and governmental-funded, sustainable support systems.

### 5.3.1 Helping School

*‘The shortest distance between teacher and student is Helping School’* (a former student).

As mentioned above, in the early 1990s it was officially possible to establish foundation schools with an alternative syllabus, which gave the Helping School the opportunity to obtain professional autonomy. The founders of this secondary school realised that the number of dropouts around the city was rising. In consequence, they organised a club in a community centre for young people who felt alienated at school to discuss ‘how a good school would work’. Prior to the first year of the school, they recruited teachers and students via mass media. Teachers had to fulfil different criteria; one of them was to be dedicated to helping challenging youth, as their help extends to every aspect of students’ lives. In 1991, the Helping School and its financial supporter, the foundation, were established to teach and support dropouts aged 16–25. The main professional task is to deliver person-centred education and guidance that will help young people improve their confidence and obtain the secondary school leaving certificate (baccalaureate: equivalent to GCSEs in England). According to one of the founders of Helping School, they aimed to recruit 40 students for the first year, but more than 500 students wanted to apply for the 40 places.

Currently, Helping School has about 150 students every year, but according to the principal, three times as many young people visit the institution a year who would be happy to attend. The profile and structure have changed slightly because they started as a full-time educational establishment, but later introduced part-time courses for students with part-time jobs. In 1996, a dedicated teacher decided to run a prison programme, and with her colleagues she started to visit prisoners whose intention was to pass the baccalaureate. Helping School has another special programme for drug addicts called STOP, which was established in 2005. The co-workers of Helping School and STOP constitute a professional team, in spite of the fact



that they are located in two different locations in the city. The students of STOP have a twofold aim: they wish to stop using drugs, and to obtain their baccalaureates. STOP has developed an education programme that is part of the rehabilitation process, so students study in small groups in the mornings, and have individual and/or group therapy in the afternoons. They also take part in a social integration programme, which means that they can work part-time for designated workplaces.

To help develop knowledge and national/international professional networks, Helping School has become a member of different national (e.g. Association of Alternative Schools) and international (e.g. E2C) organisations, and has worked together on different projects with them, which mainly focus on how to tackle ESL in secondary education.

### **5.3.1.1 Everyday life in Helping School**

Helping School works with dropouts who face multiple difficulties, so a target group which without help and support would face obstacles to managing a career in education and/or on the labour market. Thus, Helping School has implemented a method, which is based on three pillars: an encouraging school atmosphere (see some images in Appendix 3), whole-day structured activities, and the helping pair system<sup>18</sup>. A former student (female, 25, Hun) described the atmosphere:

Helping School is like a circus ... yeah, a friendly circus where you can study ... I'd say it's a bit surreal when you enter first ... there are different people in the gathering room eating and drinking coffee ... for example, you can see a punk, a gypsy, a gay

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<sup>18</sup> website of the Hungarian second chance school

person and a skinhead on the couch chatting peacefully ... a place where you can freely express yourself.

Staff stated that their aim is to create a tolerant atmosphere where all young people can feel accepted and can maintain egalitarian relationships (teacher-student, student-student and teacher-teacher relationships). In this egalitarian community, rules are formulated by teachers and students, and the main forum for this is the weekly assembly. A significant element of the supportive atmosphere is the helping pair system, which is based on the students' voluntary choice of a favourable teacher. The helping teacher meets the student once a week to support and follow their life and career. In order to achieve this, the helping teacher reviews the student's individual learning plan, and, if needed, arranges for support to manage outstanding issues such as family or health problems, housing or employment issues. The helping teacher is a member of the crew that consists of all full-time staff members. They meet once a week to supervise each other, and to talk about every student's issues on equal grounds. Thus, communication between the crewmembers can be considered a model for students. A former student (male, 40, Hun) described these meetings: '...we were outside and sometimes heard them arguing ... it was such a great feeling to know they argued to make our lives better ... we really felt they were interested in us ...'.

The staff room gives students the opportunity to socialise too, as they are free to enter. There are many activities, such as arts and crafts and film clubs that create a lively and egalitarian community, besides classes. From 9.00am to 2.30pm, students study in small groups in which flexible teaching methods and tasks tailored to individual needs are applied. Every student follows an individual learning programme (ILP), whose details are always discussed and modified by the student and their helper-teacher every semester. The ILP is an agreement

between the student and the school, which makes the aims, responsibilities and achievements clear for both parties.

The academic year is divided into semesters, with workshop and exam periods. The exams prepare students for the final baccalaureate exams, which are organised with an independent examination committee, which means that the students are not examined by their teachers, thereby ensuring impartiality and raising the value of the exams. According to the interviewed teachers and former students, this is the first time when students realise how much they have changed personally and academically. Correspondingly, all of the former students I interviewed considered obtaining their baccalaureate to be an important turning point because it gave them back self-esteem, and opened new perspectives in higher education and/or on the labour market.

Finding the right pathway after the baccalaureate is prepared for in the last year through the helper-pair system, peers, and the career education classes. Basically, students talk about their plans with their helping-teacher and search for different opportunities on career-related websites. Besides the individual sessions, there are group activities in the career education lessons once a week, where they can practice job interview skills and can gain more self-knowledge and information about different job opportunities. One activity involves the tutor (who is the social worker, and responsible for career education and guidance) of the subject inviting representatives of different jobs to class, who are then interviewed by the students. Some of the guests are former students, who are seen as role models by the class. Besides career education and guidance, the social worker is also responsible for finding the right placement for finalists' community work, as according to the new regulations in the Act on Public Education (2011), young people have to undertake community work (50 hours) as a precondition for sitting the exams leading to the leaving certificate. Locations of such work

are typically NGOs, schools, hospitals and kindergartens. In addition, most students are familiar with the world of work because they have part-time jobs to maintain an independent household, or to support disadvantaged families.

Students spend from one to five years in this school, depending on their mental and/or learning capacity. One of the former students I interviewed spent 11 years in Helping School becoming abstinent and obtaining a baccalaureate. He then went on to set up a successful family restaurant. When I asked him (40, male, former student, Hun) what Helping School meant to him, he said:

Everything. They saved my life. If I had not been surrounded with them, I could have died ... I lied to everyone in my family, really ... but here they did not let me play any roles, I had to be myself.

This example demonstrates the aim of Helping School, which is to take care of, and educate dropouts aged between 16-25 years and help them adapt to society.

According to the principal, even though they also have long-term plans to support young people, without the government's continuous financial support they have to focus on short-term planning just to keep the institution going. As he said: 'we have learnt how to survive ... we always know every problem has a solution ... we have discovered enough survival techniques to consider in the last 25 years.' Finally, it should be noted that Helping School's capacity is limited, as there are only 150 places each academic year, but according to the statistics the number of lost young people who turn to them with the desire to attend is at least three times as many. In addition, cross-sectorial cooperation and good practices related to ESL will remain lacking for most of the youngsters in need until the government modifies its financial mechanisms to compensate for the anomalies of the Hungarian education system.

## **5.4 The English local context – Grey Town**

Grey Town is a large town in the north of England that expanded dramatically with the development of a number of industries. Closure of these industries in the 1970s and the early 1980s caused some economic difficulties. According to an interview with a local politician, the town has not been able to fully recover, so there are lots of families here with an intergenerational culture of unemployment. The local politician also emphasised the importance of education for breaking the vicious cycle of unemployment, because people with no or a low level of qualification are more likely to remain in poverty. The principal of Landing College described the disappointing situation of Grey Town:

Many youngsters have got parents and grandparents who have not worked. They live in a household where nobody has worked. Nobody gets out of bed in the morning early to go to work. And that is, for some people, that's their life. They are in that situation. So...the employment situation here is quite poor, there is employment but a lot of it is part-time, a lot of it is very low level. It means that the thought that they could get on and stay locally is something that youngsters feel quite defeated about I think.

The local authority has introduced some initiatives in the last five years, such as the Virtual School (VS) for Looked After Children (LAC), and the Virtual School for Traveller Communities (TC) to maximise their educational progress. They collect data to track students' attainment, attendance and exclusion in a database. According to the champion of LAC in Landing College, 'VS provides important information about LAC when they enrol; moreover, VS and the college cooperate on a regular basis until the given students finish their studies to ensure that at-risk students attend.'

Regarding career advice and guidance a former Connexions adviser that was interviewed stated that it was a real loss when the Connexions service was closed down. She mentioned that a deprived place like Grey Town would need a centre similar to Connexions to help young people find their way back to education or the labour market. She emphasised that impartial career advice and guidance is often lacking in every educational setting, as some schools cannot afford to hire career practitioners. She also added that they use social media, for instance Facebook and Twitter, to approach young people, and this seems to be a useful method. A civil servant was asked how the local government could set up an advisory centre that could replace Connexions. She stated that they had already considered the importance of an advisory centre in the town centre that was easily accessible to young people. She was aware that young people could only turn to the job centre or to the career practitioners at different educational institutions for advice on future perspectives.

According to this civil servant who was interviewed, cross-sectorial cooperation is essential for solving young people's problems, so there are committed partnerships between the local government, NHS, the job centre, charities (including the local foodbank<sup>19</sup>, the Red Cross, and Christian organisations), and designated homes for LAC, organisations working with homeless young people, the police, some employers, and local educational institutions such as Landing College.

#### **5.4.1 Landing College**

Landing College is a further education college with approximately 6,000 students who attend different courses mainly at Level 1 or 2, while some Level 3 courses also exist. They also run

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<sup>19</sup> A *food bank* or *foodbank* is a non-profit, charitable organisation that hands out food to those who struggle to buy enough food to stave off hunger.

second chance, bridging and inclusion programmes (such as the Prince's Trust, Volunteering and Life Skills Programmes) and apprenticeship schemes.

The college obtains funds from a range of sources, but also runs a company, a hotel and a conference centre. The college's philosophy is that everything they put into that budget works for the benefit of learners. The college's holistic approach towards students is an important consideration when they distribute the budget because they would like to spend their money on a system that supports students. As Grey Town is a deprived area, some people find it difficult to obtain qualifications due to their family circumstances. The college staff believe that they have to create an environment that students enjoy. So, the whole structure is about trying to keep students on a positive path, to keep them productive, and move them into employment or higher education. According to the principal, there are educational, ethical and moral reasons for creating an effective support system for students that can be considered a contribution to society. He also emphasised that college is more than 'doing a course', because the whole environment is structured to nurture young people. Adults who go to college at a later stage can enjoy as much support as younger ones. For instance, ex-offenders study and obtain qualifications here as part of their rehabilitation.

The college's efforts have been recognised by Ofsted, as Landing College earned an 'outstanding' classification for its well-structured support system. The support system consists of different teams and is led by a senior guidance counsellor. First, there is a counselling team with four counsellors who are trained humanistically. The team also offer six training placements for second-year university students or Master's students specialised in counselling. The profile of the clients covers the whole spectrum – from a young person who has fallen out with a boyfriend or friend, to individuals presenting with different mental health issues. To solve these problems the college works with external agencies because of the level of complexity, and in certain cases when the college is closed external services offer

24-hour care; for instance, the crisis intervention team, the Children & Adolescent and adult Mental Health Services (CAMS) and the Red Cross. The counselling team also offers clinical supervision, staff supervision and mentoring, so they are there to give advice and guidance in relation to safeguarding or behavioural management. They work with methods such as anger management for students through the tutorial system. In addition, they work with a chaplaincy team who volunteer at the college. Chaplains go to college at various times, and offer support through events. The chaplaincy team is managed through the counselling service because they often offer listening services in the case of bereavement; they can also accompany students who are afraid of going to college.

Counsellors at the college have 20-25 clients a week. According to the statistics of the 2010-11 academic year, they conducted 1,090 counselling appointments. In 2011-12 they conducted 2,220, and in 2013 2,086 appointments, while in 2014 they delivered 2,489 counselling appointments. According to the leader of the counselling team: 'This is a good and very well-embedded service ... What's been seen across the FE world in terms of therapeutic intervention is that the uptake has risen.' They offer open-ended appointments for students who, on average, have four to six sessions.

A very important part of the support system is the Financial Team; this group receives funds from the government through the Skills Funding Agency and the Educational Funding Agency (which has now been replaced by the Education and Skills Funding Agency since April 2017). The former is for 16-18 year olds, and the latter for 19-plus students. They also receive funding through Student Finance England, which is called 24+. This is associated with a loan system that students can apply for. The college also has a small pot of money for students. To apply for funding, students have to meet certain criteria. Unfortunately, there are many applications that cannot be funded; there were approximately 1,200 last year. The 19-plus year old students also get funding for childcare, and the 16-18 year olds get a



government grant which is called 'care to learn' that will pay for their children to be in education. Basically, the aim of the financial support is to break down the barriers that stop people getting into college. The Financial Team collaborate with the counsellors to solve students' multi-faceted problems. Crisis loans, set up by the college, are available to young people who are under the age of 18, who live by themselves, and need a short-term loan.

Other support for students is available from the pastoral, nursing and welfare teams. The Pastoral Team consists of ten pastoral support workers and collaborates with the Financial Team (financial support is linked to attendance, so students have to have an attendance rate of more than 80% to be eligible). Pastoral support work relates to attendance and retaining people. The nursery team offers an on-site nursery for children aged from six months to five years old to support students with children. The team works very closely with the financial support team and the welfare team to solve young parents' issues. Finally, the welfare team consists of social workers and youth workers who are responsible for welfare, child protection plans, looked-after children, the care leavers' common assessment framework, and for any issues related to vulnerable students. This includes dealing with issues such as housing, homelessness, finance, health, domestic violence and abuse. They also work with the students' families if needed. There is a well-being clinic within the team, which can provide support with all sexual health services, drug and alcohol services, stopping smoking, obesity, dietetics and psychological well-being. In summary, they are the team on the ground that get involved with the students, and as the leader of the counselling team stated, *'they do a lot of referring, so 'there's a lot of cross-pollination between the teams'*.

Finally, there are six career advisers in the Careers Team who help students find the right pathway if they feel lost on a given course, or newcomers, or those who would like to enter employment. They have established good relationships with the job centre, career practitioners in the local government, and employers. Job fairs are organised in the common

room, and various companies are invited to run recruitment sessions. The college's support system follows a holistic approach to helping students focus on their studies.

The college tries to serve the community as a public building and also organises outdoor programmes to make the college more accessible and engaging to youth who are not in education. Additionally, they run a number of programmes aimed at the wider community. For instance, there is a preventative initiative called Children's University which enrolls children from the age of seven to build their aspirations by the time they graduate at 11 years old. They collaborate with local primary schools to offer students a place, and work with the families of children who are accepted. In practice, families are supposed to take the children to museums, galleries and the swimming pool to collect points in their booklet that contribute to graduation. Thus, families who traditionally do not visit these places are encouraged by their children to take part in these activities. The Children's University has functioned for six years, so the first 16 and 17 year olds who have graduated from that system are now studying at the college.

Another preventative measure is the Forest School, which works in partnership with schools to offer unique learning experiences. This institution provides activities and design topics for children to up to Key Stage 4. As the leader of Forest School said, 'This is a great place to teach kids to enjoy and discover the beauty of nature because most of them stay indoors on the weekends ... their parents do not take them to the woods, they'd rather watch TV'.

From the research into courses that deal with the NEET cohort, three second chance courses including The Prince's Trust and Volunteering are introduced next. The Prince's Trust is a 12-week, full-time personal development programme for young people between the age of 16 and 25<sup>20</sup>. The course is designed to boost young people's self-esteem, motivation and capability of working with others. The course is led by two tutors who are supported by a

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<sup>20</sup> website of the English second chance provision

teaching assistant. Students start the course with indoor team-building activities and then spend five days in the woods. In the following weeks, they design community projects and choose one for implementation. They usually help schools, retired homes or charities (see images in Appendix 4). As a part of their individual learning programme they go on work placements to experience the world of work. Each student compiles an individual portfolio. They can develop skills such as career planning, presentation, teamwork, employability and communication. This course helps young people to pursue their chosen career by helping them find a job or progress to a college course.

The profile of the Volunteering Programme is very similar to that of the Prince's Trust in terms of content. However, students spend up to a year on the programme. They have more opportunities to develop their skills and engage with more tutorials. A range of volunteering alternatives is offered within Landing College, such as: the 'Buddy' system for learners who are leaving care or who are currently cared for by Foster Carers or other agencies. Students participating in this programme can increase their employability skills during the 24-week placement<sup>21</sup>. All of these courses are supported primarily by the Welfare Team and the Careers Team.

In conclusion, it is clear that Landing College plays a key role in engaging young people with education and training from the local community. Even though they have experienced cutbacks, just as have many other colleges in England, they have had different opportunities to generate funds from different sources to run a well-structured support system for the benefit of learners. As such, there is a range of provisions that engage young people who need enhanced levels of support. They work closely with local government, local organisations, employers, schools and charities to enjoy the advantages of cross-organisation

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid*

cooperation. Some professionals who were interviewed were concerned about those who leave the college, and the lack of support in the local community.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter describes the context and highlights good practice, including different models of support, second chance provisions and examples of cross-sectorial cooperation in three contrasting national contexts to demonstrate how policies and measures determine everyday practices.

As the three field sites chosen for this research represent different forms of second chance provision, they have been described by emphasising the characteristics of each institution in the local context to shed light on how challenging youth can be supported and educated. These characteristics underpin why former students interviewed for this research from each country often consider their participation at these institutions as a turning point in their lives. This factor is explored in depth in later chapters.

## **Chapter 6 Before Second Chance**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, findings are presented about why research participants were motivated to take part in second chance provisions. The aim is to identify typical patterns of causes and experiences that led young people to pursue an alternative pathway. The research participants experienced schooling in various ways, and the factors, which contributed to their experiences are complex and multi-faceted. The grounded-theory analysis raised a number of overarching themes and commonalities in their narratives.

The first part of this chapter describes the negative experiences research participants reported having faced in mainstream education, which – according to the participants’ accounts – most contributed to their loss of confidence. Research participants criticised the institutional context, mainly the disadvantages of rigid education systems, including the role of teaching. They also gave detailed accounts about their experiences as they transitioned from initial to secondary education. The second part of the chapter introduces family-related issues which are reported to have influenced the well-being and confidence of respondents, causing a number of problems at the individual level (including of a psychological nature), including addiction, eating disorders, depression and identity issues.

### **6.2 Institutional contexts: ‘Old-fashioned’ schools and ‘unpleasant’ teachers**

*Rigid mainstream education systems* emerged in the process of analysis as having the most influence on dropouts/at-risk students, with research participants expressing how they had felt alienated from mainstream education. Moreover, research participants criticised the three systems of education under consideration precisely and insightfully. Critiques included the

fact that teachers in mainstream initial education had not been motivated enough to catch and hold students' attention, as attendance had been obligatory and students had been expected to follow instructions. According to the students from the three countries, challenging or 'tricky cases' (students) were unfortunately outside the interest of the majority of teachers.

Rasmus (29, male, DK), made an interesting case about being identified with the label 'challenging', and also reverted to this description in some senses. He stated that:

I didn't like the teachers that much in Folkeskole [primary school]. I found that they were kind of too harsh and strict and that they wouldn't argue their points. When I asked something: why is it like this and that? ... they said... it's just the way it is and you have to listen and don't do this and that, but you have to do this ... Because the teachers were totally crappy, really annoying ... I, perhaps, I was a bit provocative as well, because I kind of challenged them in their beliefs and teaching methods and so on and at the end they were annoyed with me.

Another participant, Tibor (30, male, Hun), said that he had experienced ignorance in the class:

you know, they [teachers] had the power and sometimes used it against us ... instead of making us involved, they just said the instructions ... and f...all, left us alone with our problems ... and we had to be silent, of course, otherwise we were told off.

Similarly, a third participant, John (26, male, Eng) also complained about the effect of teachers' neglect: '... sometimes I did not understand why they [teachers] could not be bothered ... I was at the back, slowly giving up on asking questions ...'

As the aforementioned excerpts illustrate, research participants, regardless of where they attended mainstream education, all reported to experiencing the ignorance of teachers and

incompetent teaching in classes to some extent. As a result, they lost interest in knowledge acquisition and became estranged from schooling. Moreover, some of them felt that they did not belong to the school at all. Likewise, another study found that students turned into outsiders in schools as they rarely met teachers who were prepared to listen to them and support them in dealing with challenges (Stokes, 2000). A Spanish study also highlights that young people who had dropped out of school had negative experiences with teachers (Fernandez et al., 2010).

In the Danish cohort some research participants with a migrant background faced severe neglect, which resulted in the development of a negative self-concept and alienation from mainstream schooling. One of them, Ali (26, male, DK), complained about his form teacher using these words:

She would never pick me, like, to ask a question, she never wanted to pick me. I was like raising my hand in the air for like an hour. The whole time in class until recess... she would never pick me at all, she was just looking at me and looking down to the desk again ... So that got me into a very bad place, because my idea was: why are they treating me like this? What am I doing wrong?

Yuri Belfali (2016), an expert from the OECD, reported similar conclusion at the *'Togetherness and Motivation'* Conference (Olerup, Denmark) based on the PISA 2015 Results. Namely, students with a migrant background and reasonable academic performance felt estranged in Danish mainstream schools; a situation, which may be related to the student-teacher relationship in mainstream Danish schools<sup>22</sup>. Kinder and colleagues (Kinder et al., 1995; Kendall & Kinder, 2005) similarly argued that student-teacher relationships should be considered influential, because inadequate relationships with teachers might result in students

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<sup>22</sup> more details on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gCMYWbBTEg>

becoming disengaged from school. Another study by Byrne and Smyth (2010) considered teachers' attitudes towards students to be significant, as early school leavers disclosed that their teachers had not shown interest in them (Byrne & Smyth, 2010). The majority of students in this study reported at least one or two negative experiences from initial education. Correspondingly, one of the Danish participants, Oscar (25, male, DK) shared a negative and disturbing experience that happened to him in initial education:

In the fourth year we had a teacher, I think she was like a vegan new-age [person]. I don't know. Like I'm not saying anything bad about those people, but she was like an extremely radical person. Once I had a birthday cake, and she was scraping off the icing on the birthday cake because it was too fattening or something. And of course I was like crying and stuff. I could not handle that.

Research participants from the three countries under investigation expressed criticism about the traditional methods applied in mainstream education that resulted in teaching being too focussed on the curriculum and delivery of subject content rather than a learner-centred approach. This is contrasted with the practice of second chance schools in the participants' interview narratives, which were said to provide a comparative experience to students, enabling them to generate more sharper and poignant criticism of mainstream education. As Alex (27, male, DK) stated disapprovingly about his mainstream experiences: 'There is a lot of focus on academic subjects ... they [teachers] have to do marking ... there is no time to get to know us...'

Two Hungarian research participants also criticised the traditional methods applied in mainstream education. Edina (31, female, Hun) reported: 'We had to learn lots of facts and numbers, I hardly remember anything, really ... teachers just wanted to stuff our heads, they were not interested in how we could learn, in who we were '. Zsofi (19, female, Hun) said: 'I



just couldn't focus on anything in that big classroom, most of the time I did not pay attention to what was said, it was too much to absorb.'

Chloe (27, female, Eng), highlighted the wrong attitudes to young people and the teaching methods experienced in mainstream education that resulted in her leaving the sixth form:

Because I think from year 11 to 12 you grow up a lot, and I don't think the school grows with you. I think it's restricted ... (in) year 11 still, you are still a child, when you are not, you're an adult then. They just want you to learn and behave sensibly. So I decided I don't want that, it's all about how you're treating me and things like that. I prefer a lot more freedom and to be treated like an adult. So that's why I left.

A number of research participants from all three countries criticised '*the focus on achievement*', which sometimes resulted in them feeling disengaged because of the competitive atmosphere at school. Some pointed out that they felt less freedom at school because teachers forced standardised tasks on them which were either hard or too easy to understand, therefore some of them decided to obtain knowledge through self-study.

Ali (26, male, DK) disclosed how he started studying by himself during his initial education:

They didn't teach me anything about how I should learn to speak, how to think, how to research ... You know, how did I learn everything? I tried to teach myself, it was like OK, in this game I could learn English, and that's where I picked up most of my English skills, which is pretty awesome now, right?

Similarly, Karl-Georg (27, male with dyslexia, DK) also complained about his initial school teacher who could not find the right method for teaching a student with dyslexia how to read. Furthermore, the teacher did not pay any attention to the students' interests and hobbies, which he could have built upon while teaching:

I taught myself how to read because my teacher said that I couldn't learn to read from comics. I said I could. But I wasn't allowed to read them in the library, I had to read 'proper' books instead, like the others, but I couldn't do that... I just wanted to read comics and then when I got the summer holidays that year I did, and I taught myself how to read... because comics were so exciting, I just read them again and again and understood more and more.

A lot of youngsters who drop out of school early find it challenging coping with the teaching methods used in mainstream education, suggesting that alternative approaches and tailor-made methods would be more suitable for meeting students' individual needs (EC, 2011). As discussed in the interview excerpts above, the rigidity of mainstream education and its inability to personalise learning negatively impacted the research participants' school careers. Likewise, a European research project (EP, 2010) concluded that teaching methods should adapt more to the needs of at-risk students because traditional teaching and a lack of understanding of the needs of the young people were identified as key factors of disengagement (EP, 2010).

In the Hungarian education system, marking down (grade reduction) is a significant factor in disengagement, and is applied as one of the disciplinary methods – a kind of common practice – by helpless teachers (Fehérvári, 2015). As a Hungarian interviewee, Orsi (28, female, Hun) stated about year repetition: 'If you do not fit in, teachers can punish you with a 1 [the lowest grade in the Hungarian 5-scale grading system] repeatedly, and at the end of the term, you fail. This has happened to me a lot.'

Likewise, Csilla (31, female, Hun) mentioned teachers' harmful practice of handing out bad grades: 'I received lots of 1s and 2s for Maths, it was so disappointing. I was always afraid of

bad grades, so when the class started I was already scared; there was no relief, no success, just stress.’

As the excerpts above illustrate, and also as Fehérvári (2015) argues, grade repetition is a significant factor in disengagement which can cause many students to drop out and experience failure before the age of 16. Unfortunately, in the Hungarian education system there is a tendency to make students who fail a number of subjects repeat the whole year, which can result in students leaving the education system without a leaving certificate at the age of 16 (the end of compulsory school attendance) (Fehérvári, 2015).

My findings suggest that the mainstream education systems in the three countries appear to share/create similar problems, although to different degrees. The extent of, and access to, support systems for young people greatly varies across the national systems, and cross-sectorial cooperation also differs to some extent. Furthermore, different socio-economic factors come into play. In order to better understand these characteristics, the structure of these national education systems has to be taken into consideration (see more detail in Chapters 4 and 5). In the interviews, participants from the three countries reflected critically on the features of their education systems and on their societies/labour markets. It was impressive to hear that some research participants placed responsibility on the system for failures experienced in their careers. For instance, English and Hungarian respondents had strikingly similar opinions, because most of them felt lost and alienated at school, and abandoned by society.

Jonny (25, male, Eng) complained about his negative experiences in the English education system regarding the transition to secondary education and the high tuition fees at universities that stopped him attending university:

Yeah, I just found the college by accident really, teachers did not tell me ‘hey, go there it would be good for you’. After college I wanted to go to uni, but I did not want to start my life in debt, no way, this country does not let people – like me – fly.

László (34, male, Hun) was also disappointed about his country’s education system, and about the government’s ignorance towards youth:

I just did not fit in, and then I joined the gang, yeah, drugs, alcohol and rock ’n roll. One day I bumped into Dóri at Moszkva Square, she told me to go to Helping School, and I did. I have no idea where I would have ended up without Dóri. No, Hungary does not help young people who are lost. To top it all, the government squashes schools like Helping School.

As can be seen, in England and Hungary participants were critical of the education system, whereas participants from Denmark were more satisfied with schooling and society. For instance, Mads (27, male, DK) was very satisfied with Denmark:

But Denmark has a unique education system, we have so many schools and we can get SU [a government grant for each young person attending education above 18 years of age]. It’s very unique in this country. So, I think some students do not think that they are actually privileged and pampered by our society. They should remember that they get an education for free from the state, but they don’t think about other countries where the family has to earn the money over many years to pay for their children’s education.

In conclusion, it was impressive to learn how some research participants placed responsibility on the system for failures experienced in mainstream education. Their stories also shed light on incompetent teachers’ attitudes and the teaching methods applied in mainstream education

that, in most cases, resulted in students feeling alienated. In addition, some research participants' critical accounts of the education systems referred to the role of the transition to secondary education, which is demonstrated in detail in the following sub-chapter.

### **6.2.1 Transition to secondary education**

According to the interviews with research participants from the three countries under analysis, the transition from initial education to secondary education was a significant milestone in their careers. The transition process from primary education to secondary is significantly different in the three countries, which is an important factor because the literature (Borbely-Pecze, 2010; Cedefop, 2015; RESL, 2014) strikingly suggests that schools' provision of information, advice and guidance is influential in the career progression of at-risk students. As described in Chapter 4, in England and Hungary institutionalised, impartial career guidance is not easily accessible to students in the phase of transition. For instance, in England some students, like Jessica (27, female, Eng) explained that they felt lost during the transition phase:

From primary school you are like chunked in, and you get used to it kind of thing, and you don't know any difference. I didn't like the transition from primary school to high school because of the unstable environment, I wasn't old enough to know what we are going through and things like that. I didn't like it and that caused a lot of problems for me in my early years of high school, I think.

On the other hand, in Denmark, students' transition from comprehensive school to secondary education is generally supported by impartial guidance counsellors assigned by the Youth Guidance Centres. Danish participants also highlighted the positive role of guidance

counselling. For instance, Sebastian (27, male, DK) pointed out the importance of guidance counsellors (GC) in the transition from primary to secondary education:

Basically, it's because in our school system it goes like this: you have to make like 3 wishes about wherever you want to go to school after elementary school, and then if you have no clue at all, a vejleder [guidance counsellor] will come and help you decide and look for schools because she knows different schools.

In contrast, research participants in England and Hungary reported that they identified the most suitable study pathway by consulting with friends and/or family members, and only a handful of participants reported to have chosen a second chance provision because of the suggestion of a teacher and/or other professional. Three respondents also mentioned that *'it was pure luck'* that they found the 'right' pathway. Regarding the choice of second chance provisions in the three countries under consideration, all participants claimed that it was their choice to attend second chance provision.

My data analysis showed that research participants in England and Hungary were more vulnerable to dropping out of either initial or secondary education than in Denmark. This tendency can be attributed, at least in part, to the country's policy context and educational structures (see more details in Chapters 4 and 5). In practice, Danish research participants reported that guidance counsellors were easily accessible in various institutional settings, which meant that they could rely on a professional when uncertainty occurred in their careers. As a Danish participant (27, male, DK) stated: 'There is always a helping hand you can cling on to'.

In the English and Hungarian cohort, some research participants reported to encountering a lack of psychological support, mentoring and/or career guidance before the second chance provision they attended. They claimed that the former could have been helpful with making

their everyday lives easier, and helping them map out milestones related to the future career at school. In contrast, Danish students really appreciated the work of guidance counsellors at school: ‘Our vejleder [guidance counsellor] has been so helpful. He found a Support School for me ‘cos I told him I was not ready for the gymnasium [traditional academic pathway]. Luckily, he convinced my parents that the gymnasium was not for me. ’

A European cross-country study also emphasises that the existence of different sources of support (e.g. psychologist, mentor and/or career counsellor) is essential for stopping at-risk students who have social and emotional issues dropping out (EP, 2010). Another important issue is that young people’s individual needs (such as the complex and multi-faceted issues that occur during their schooling) should be taken into consideration when they are provided with professional support.

It should be emphasised that the quality of education has a significant impact on ESL, so educational policies that aim to reduce ESL should be introduced that create the conditions for universal equity in education. Achieving this would result in a comprehensive improvement in educational measures, and the quality of education in general (TWG, 2013).

### **6.3 Family background**

During the process of analysis, the second most influential theme that emerged for at-risk students/dropouts before secondary school career was *family background*. About 80% of the interview participants reported that there had been problems at home (mainly divorce), which had caused uncertainty in relationships with parents, and in some cases separation from siblings. Moreover, according to many, this was one of the main reasons they had to leave school early. Some research participants claimed that divorce had created conflict and altered

the value systems of parents, resulting in confusion, role-conflict, and complicated dynamics in the separated family.

Benjamin (27, male, DK) talked about how hard it had been for him to be separated from his brother, and to cope with the very different values of his parents after they divorced:

Mum was a kinda hippie, and dad was a disciplined economist, hardcore, you know. Of course, they divorced, I dunno why they chose each other in the first place. My dad moved to Jylland, far-far away with my little bro, so anyway, I travelled every second weekend to their place to meet my little bro.

Benjamin's constant traveling to spend time with his brother at the weekends caused difficulties in his social life as he became isolated from his peers: '[S]o I could hardly make friends at Folkeskole (comprehensive school) and then dad set up a family and a new baby came, and mum had different boyfriends, but all I wanted was to spend time with my bro ... '

The same pattern of isolation experienced in school occurs in Roland's (25, male, DK) story, where it is evident that divorces and repeated relocations made him a complete outsider at school:

Basically, I started school in [place], and my mum and dad divorced and the whole trip began. So I moved from that school to another school, for, I think, one and a half years, but I was bullied so bad, so I moved to another school and my mum also moved around and we moved three times ... and then we moved to a small town, 'cos mum had found a new guy, and I was bullied again. Then I moved to a Catholic school, I went there for two years, and it was pretty great, except for the teachers. And then we moved to another place, which is a slum, we lived there for two years. When I grew up, kinda became a teenager, kind of did not know what to do, and we moved away



again, I started a new school, a class, it was 8<sup>th</sup> grade. So it wasn't that bad actually, and after I started speaking with my vejleder [guidance counsellor].

Likewise, in April's (32, female, England) narrative, divorce resulted in her moving locations and schools, and there are startling resemblances with Roland's story:

I don't know really, my mum just liked moving. So every time she moved, we had to move schools. Then we moved to a totally different area called [place] and we lived there for three years, and then we moved back. I was really quiet at school, and I got bullied quite a lot. I struggled quite a lot, I thought, because I was very shy and that I never opened up and never asked for help. So we just kept moving to different areas, so we had to move schools. It was only when we moved back here from [place], when we became stable because I told my mum to put her foot down, I always said: Mum, I'm starting high school, I don't want to move no more, I want to stay at the same school.

From the research participants' narratives it can be seen how the divorce of parents and related adversity were associated with a negative spiral involving school failures, isolation, and sometimes deviance and drug use/abuse. It was interesting that a number of research participants from the Danish and Hungarian cohort talked openly about their drug misuse. In contrast, research participants from England hardly referred to drug issues in the interviews. I believe the reason for this mainly involved the atmosphere of the educational institutions, and my position as a researcher there (see more detail in Chapter 3 and the next subchapter).

One research participant from the Danish cohort, Amir (27, male, DK) explained that he grew up in different countries because of his parents' divorce, and from age 14 he lived with his adult brother, without parents, which resulted in drug addiction: '...So I just came and lived

with my brother and then I started going to school, and then I met X, and then we started smoking weed..’

The findings of this research emphasise that, before the age of 16, divorce is a significant factor in at-risk students’ school careers. A number of European cross-country studies (EP, 2010; EC, 2011; TWG, 2013) similarly point out that family events such as divorce can lead to inadequate/inconsistent parenting, which may impact students’ engagement.

During data analysis, I identified other family factors, which influenced the at-risk school careers of students, such as the fact that family expectations about social behaviour are different from those at school; and parental expectations were too high. There are narratives in the research participants’ interviews that describe how students did not live up to their parents’ high expectations in their school years. In the English and Hungarian stories, the mismatch between expectations led students to drop out temporarily. In contrast, Danish participants whose intentions regarding schooling differed from their parents’ were offered an alternative study pathway.

Jessica (25, female, Eng) from the English cohort did not meet her mother’s high expectations so she left the sixth form, and later her mother, too:

I live with my dad ‘coz at the time I lived with my difficult mum and she chose the 6<sup>th</sup> form for me. It was awful, and I didn’t tell her I stopped going to the 6<sup>th</sup> form, I was not brave. I went in, she dropped me in the morning and I used to walk back out, and hang out with friends. She didn’t know anything. And then I came to college and finally told her: “Listen, I stopped going to the 6<sup>th</sup> form, I found this course at college.” I explained it to her, well what that was all about. But she went ballistic, obviously. She didn’t listen, and then I just decided to leave ‘coz I couldn’t live with her anymore.

Similarly, a Hungarian research participant, Eszter (32, female, Hun) also suffered from what she describes as a demanding, achievement-oriented mother:

My mum is a well-known economist. So, I attended a primary school first until the 4<sup>th</sup> year when I locked myself up, and then mum took me to a private school to make me more confident. It helped for two years, but in the third year I needed a different school according to mum, therefore we went to a prestigious secondary school where I had to repeat a year because it was difficult, I did not understand what my mum did really.

Christian (39, male, DK) from the Danish cohort was more fortunate, since he found an alternative pathway after comprehensive school. He did not want to follow his parents' wishes:

Yeah, I saw some of their [Support School] plays, so I told my parents that I wanted to go there too, and I remember that they thought it was a bad idea. They told me I should go directly to the gymnasium. And we talked a lot about that with the teachers at my folkeskole [comprehensive school], and they also thought it was a stupid idea, because I had a lot of good grades. So, they were afraid that I would drop out of the gymnasium if I went to Support School first. But I was convinced that I wanted to be an actor. And I knew I would go to the National Theatre School, so I had to do theatre all the time. I just remember that it was really based on my own beliefs that this was to be a good place for me, and I dared to take this year off [from mainstream education] and stayed in the alternative arena. And after that year everyone told me that I was right, and then I started gymnasium.

The importance of family values therefore emerged strongly from the data, together with the interplay of family members and negotiations amongst them, which had had a significant

impact on the educational careers, achievement and performance of the research participants. These findings are reflected in the literature. According to Coleman, social capital is a resource that is available through attachment to a network and to various human relations (Coleman, 1998). Coleman argues that social capital is associated with education, particularly the social relations between children and their parents, moreover how these relations influence education. On the other hand, social capital is determined by the time and energy that families spend on their children's education, which plays a significant role in educational achievements (Coleman, 1998). According to the former author, in one-parent families and in families with a high number of children social capital is limited, which can have a negative effect on students' education (Coleman, 1998). Findings from this research highlight the importance for young people's career progression of educational achievement and the ways in which social relations and social capital influence educational achievement, together with financial and human capital. For instance, in Hungary and the UK socio-economic status plays a significant role in schooling, as young people of higher socio-economic status perform significantly better at every stage of the education system than do those from lower socio-economic groups. In addition, the gap between the best and worst performers widens as young people proceed through the education system, which obviously influences school participation (Steedman & Stoney, 2004; Kendall & Kinder, 2005).

#### **6.4 Individual factors**

The third theme that emerged from the data analysis was *individual factors*. These had a significant impact on the research participants' mainstream school careers. The most influential elements of these were low self-esteem, loss of confidence, and poor coping strategies. These mainly developed from relationships with teachers, peers and parents.

A number of research participants from the three countries expressed how their loss of confidence and motivation at school was influenced by their teachers. In practice, the approach teachers applied to (under)estimate the research participants' performance varied according to the interviewees. Some examples that demonstrate this are as follows: Marton (27, male, Hun): 'I also considered myself very weak in some areas because my teachers gave me low grades ...'

Karl-Georg (28, male, DK): 'I thought, especially after folkeskole, that I wanted to be placed in the weakest class because of the low grades I got from primary. I thought I'm gonna be bad at subjects and I was nervous ...'

Jessica (24, female, Eng): 'I think, I didn't learn anything at school, and I was very silent and reserved ... teachers didn't encourage me, really, they didn't even motivate me. It was first here [college] when I found out I could do something.'

Similarly, Kinder and colleagues (1995) identified in their study the fact that students who felt estranged and alienated at school due to poor student-teacher relationships tended to have low self-esteem and confidence which, in most cases, resulted in poor school attendance.

The other significant group of factors included loss of self-esteem and low motivation caused by/associated with negative relations with peers – for instance, bullying and behavioural problems or truancy due to peer pressure. According to a number of participants from the three cohorts, bullying occurred most frequently in their school careers leading to isolation and a lack of motivation for schooling. The reasons for bullying varied, from internal and external attributes to subjects independent of the given person (e.g. first name, disadvantaged family background).

From the Danish cohort, Karl-Georg (28, male, DK) suffered a lot from bullying in Folkeskole due to his traditional first name which he was given after his grandfather, and due to his – as he reported – introvert personality:

First, I have a special name: Karl-Georg, that's kind of a weird name, it's an old farmer's name. So, lots of kids teased me and bullied me, so it was hard for me to fit in. But I had one good friend who had speech problems, but he wasn't that proactive at defending me, he just watched the whole thing, he was more like the person I could go to afterwards. So the years at school were very difficult, it's like not comparable to a normal Danish childhood because it was hard, I am talking about beatings every day. But in the end, I got so good at fighting that they couldn't beat me up and then they stopped.

As this excerpt and other sources (e.g. Hirsch et al., 2012) indicate, victims of bullying can feel angry or helpless or even lost in the system. These negative feelings can contribute to antagonistic attitudes towards schooling. In addition, bystanders who witness the victimisation of peers are also affected by bullying (like Karl-Georg's friends), and might experience negative feelings similar to those of the victim (Hirsch et al, 2012).

An additional intriguing case in the Danish cohort demonstrated how a young person with a less favourable appearance and health, and moreover with a disadvantaged family background, got into in a vulnerable, isolated position during his school career. Roland (27, male, DK) summarised his negative experiences as follows:

I got the whole package, ready to be bullied. I wasn't tall, had bad red hair and huge glasses. I have freckles, and I had asthma. Plus I stutter, as you can hear, and basically I was bullied a lot at school. I got beaten up, and people talked shit about me, but I was just minding my own business. And I didn't really have that much money, so I

didn't really wear fashionable clothing and stuff like that, so I got bullied for that too.

So they didn't get me and I didn't get them.

From the English cohort two research participants defined bullying as the most influential reason for them leaving school early. April (28, female, Eng) experienced bullying at schools she attended due to her learning difficulties, which contributed to her aloofness:

I was really quiet; I got bullied quite a lot. I never seemed to react but I struggled quite a lot. I thought ... because I was very shy and that I never opened up and never asked for help. I was fantastic at numbers, but I was absolutely rubbish at English ... I just wouldn't open up to them and say: Well, look, I need help. I just didn't dare, and then I started skipping classes. So, I eventually left school and I joined the navy ship from navy school, because that was what I wanted to do.

In the case of the Hungarian cohort, the most sorrowful story regarding bullying was about a transgender research participant. His segregated and isolated position combined with aggression and humiliating comments from his peers at school resemble narratives presented in Takács's (2007) research. In her study, she emphasises that LGBTQ students were marginalised and placed in vulnerable positions in the Hungarian education system, and points out that they have no access to professional support, which leaves many of them in isolation and despair (Takács, 2007). Her study (Takács, 2007) indicates that LGBTQ students' isolated position in school as well as in Hungarian society results in depression and other mental health issues. Similarly, Noel (25, male, Hun) described how challenging and sometimes humiliating it was for him to be at school as a transgender student:

So, I was born in a woman's body, but I was always very masculine. I became a real man just one and a half years ago. Anyway, in my teenage years, the "gang" – the tough boys in our school – teased and chased me, we had real fights and I got injured.

I was bullied very badly, which was painful. Somehow I lost myself, and then I had a nervous breakdown when I was hospitalised and I lost contact with the outside world, and then experienced depression because I could not accept my situation, that people won't let me live as I am.

These quotations provide powerful illustrations of how bullying at school can affect students' self-esteem and their perspectives about education. Many factors contribute to the victimisation of students. My findings indicate that the main reasons are the following: being withdrawn, having learning difficulties, an irregular appearance or name, talents, and belonging to a different sexual orientation.

According to Kendal and colleagues (2005), negative relationships with peers can strongly influence students' experience at school and contribute to early school leaving. Many at-risk students reported to have found it challenging to interact with peers, which led to further school disengagement. Bullying had a lasting negative influence on school attachment (Byrne & Smyth, 2010). Other research (HOJCES, 2010) found that the LGBTQ students, such as Noel in the Hungarian cohort, reported suffering from exclusion and marginalisation for years, and a feeling of being unsafe due to bullying. According to a survey conducted by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2016), 61.1% of LGBTQ students in secondary education felt unsafe or uncomfortable as a result of their sexual orientation—higher proportion than their non-LGBTQ peers. The narratives of LGBTQ research participants also prove that various negative experiences at school significantly shape their identity development (Breakwell, 1983). Breakwell (1979, 1983) explored how individuals respond when their identities are under threat. My findings resonate with Breakwell's research. For instance, in Noel's narrative, the task was to bring physical facts into accord with psychological reality. The evidence of Noel's body contradicted his conception of his real identity. This can be considered a threat to identity, but it might not be the most



significant one, as the body can change. The real problem was how Noel could obtain social acceptance (Breakwell, 1983).

Breakwell's theory of Identity Process 'proposes that the individual's identity is a dynamic social product of the interaction of the capacities for memory, consciousness and organised construal with the physical and societal structures and influence processes which constitute the social context' (Breakwell, 1983, p.25). A threat to identity can be experienced when the mechanisms of assimilation/accommodation are not integrated with the principles of continuity, distinctiveness and self-efficacy (Breakwell, 1983). In the interviews, research participants reported that their identities were threatened in many respects, and also recounted how they coped with the process of restoration using different sources of support to drive identity development.

Regarding identity issues associated with learning difficulties/special educational needs (dyslexia, dyscalculia, ASD, AD/HD), health problems – including mental health issues (e.g. eating disorders: anorexia, bulimia, depression, anxiety disorder) and/or drug addiction – a number of research participants from the three countries gave a detailed account. In most cases, these issues led first to truancy, and then early school leaving. Dyslexia was one of the most frequently mentioned factors for failure or underachievement at school.

Jessica (28, female, Eng) stated that she was accused by some of her teachers of not being willing to learn, and nobody from the school staff wanted to find out the real cause of her problems with learning: 'The school teacher kept saying that I did not want to learn. I did not open up 'cos I had enough. When I decided to come to college I found out with my tutor that I'm severely dyslexic ...'

Similarly, a Danish participant, Karl-Georg (28, male, DK), also explained that he felt rejected by his teachers at school; furthermore, he was treated unfairly sometimes due to his

slow learning process: ‘The folkeskole was a dreadful place for me, I was very bad at some things; I have dyslexia so I can’t spell right. My Danish teacher was yelling at me when I didn’t do my homework and stuff. I didn’t tell him I couldn’t read. ’

A Hungarian research participant, Károly (32, male, Hun), also lost interest in reading and learning at school due to his dyslexia and his teachers’ and peers’ reactions. In order to compensate for his learning difficulties, he played a role: ‘everything was so fast for me, I could not follow classes. My reading and writing were rubbish. Some teachers and classmates teased me. I was just tired of school; instead of being bored I became the clown of my class.’

In line with the literature (Morgan et al., 1998; TWG, 2013; Kendall & Kinder, 2005), the interviews from this research illustrate how students with learning difficulties may not be provided with adequate professional support in mainstream school and thus may become withdrawn, or estranged from their teachers and/or peers. Unfortunately, many teachers are not well prepared to recognise the symptoms of learning difficulties and thus do not refer students to professionals to discuss these issues. Thus, it should be ensured that teachers should be provided with basic knowledge about different learning difficulties such as dyslexia through training or informative websites so they can refer students to relevant professionals when needed, and/or help them get access to tailor-made teaching methods at school.

An interesting turning point in the process of analysis was the recognition that substance misuse (as mentioned earlier) and mental health problems were only mentioned in the Danish and Hungarian interviews. These issues could not be identified from the interviews conducted in England. I believe that there could be two reasons for this finding. The first is the nature of data collection, as data collection was inspired by theoretical sampling in Denmark and Hungary, while in England, snowball sampling was applied (the reasons and details for this

are described in Chapter 3). The other reason might be the characteristics of the culture at the schools I visited in Denmark and Hungary where these issues were openly discussed. Moreover, students and school staff considered me part of the furniture, so to speak; my presence seemed natural to them, and we had very good relations. At the college in England, talking openly about mental health problems and addiction seemed to be taboo as we primarily discussed the topics of learning difficulties/special educational needs such as ASD and dyslexia. In addition, my presence remained formal throughout the period of the fieldwork; there was hardly any chance to build up good relationships that would have helped me to identify more sensitive issues.

Mental health problems (e.g. depression, anorexia and suicide attempts) appeared in the Danish and Hungarian research participants' lives at the time they became teenagers because hormonal changes raised their sensitivity towards an already threatening outside world.

One participant from the Danish cohort, Oscar (25, male, DK) reported how his relationship with his father deteriorated when he turned 15:

But then we got into a stupid argument, and basically, I don't know why we got so mad, he got, like, very angry. I thought it wasn't fair to treat me this way. Then I nearly told him that I was already in treatment for thoughts about suicide, and didn't want to worry him but I'd had thoughts about suicide. And when I was standing at the door about to leave, my father looked at me and said it was probably best if we didn't see each other again...and then I left and took my mum's medicines the following day.

Likewise, one participant from the Hungarian cohort, Eszter (31, female, Hun) described her hard teenage years when her perfectionism resulted in her losing interest in school, and how she became anorexic, leading to her hospitalisation and her losing contact with peers:

I became a teenager, rioting inside. I went home on time and stuff, but I didn't study. I thought if I couldn't study everything perfectly, I wouldn't start it at all. I guess it was perfectionism, and then my teenage years hit me very badly. So, I did not want to eat because I could not accept myself. I spent lots of time in hospital isolated, and then I dropped out of school...

Similarly to my findings, a number of European cross-country studies (EP, 2010; EC, 2011; TWG, 2013) emphasise that learning difficulties mostly associated with low self-management skills and various health/mental health problems, moreover addiction, are a feature of at-risk students' lives (Kendall & Kinder, 2005). Adolescence is a crucial period for young at-risk people, when the aforementioned difficulties become more challenging and students confront institutional norms, so teachers and other professionals should pay more attention to this sensitive phase of life and to the need to avoid serious damage to young people's general/mental health. The WATCH study concluded that if at least one person in an institution shows a personal interest in a student who is at risk of dropping out, the individual stands a better chance of avoiding further failures and of succeeding in life (Birgisdottir, 2004).

## **6.5 Summary**

The data presented in this chapter have powerfully illuminated the nature of the negative experiences narrated by research participants in the three countries under investigation. These experiences were attributable to a number of factors, including:

- systemic ones such as teachers using inappropriate teaching methods and approaches; the rigid school environment in mainstream education; a focus on achievement rather than the

person in the teaching and learning process; the transition from initial to secondary education; bullying;

- familial factors such as rigorous and demanding parents; dysfunctional families; divorces; individual factors: losing confidence/self-esteem; and learning difficulties and health problems including mental health issues.

As the findings illustrate, students experience schooling and teenage years in varied ways, with the factors that influence their experiences being complex and multi-faceted. This research therefore draws attention to the consequences of traditional education systems, and formulates recommendations with regard to services targeted at the individual needs of the students that can raise at-risk students' productivity and performance. Unfortunately, most of the interviews highlighted how mainstream education still operates like an '*old knowledge factory*' (as one of the Hungarian policy makers defined it) in the three countries under investigation. In the following chapter, good practices are identified in relation to how disengaged interview participants can become reengaged having entered alternative provisions.

## **Chapter 7 Second Chance**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores the positive experiences of former students in second chance provision in England, Denmark and Hungary, and analyses different processes and agents that helped transform students' negative thoughts about their school experience into friendly and steady cooperation between students and teachers. Evidence is derived from the interviews conducted with research participants. More specifically, narratives of 'success' are explored from the perspectives of former students who participated in the research and were at risk of dropping out or who had dropped out of secondary education in one of the three different national contexts. In some cases, the participants' narratives are complemented with field notes from observations carried out over the course of 14 months from 2014 to 2015. These observations are used to describe, for instance, the characteristics of the educational institutions, including the staff, atmosphere and working methods.

From listening and giving a voice to young people, it is striking that the relevance and importance of personal support with special regard to the creation of positive relationships (such as those between the teacher and the student, and the career guidance counsellor/mentor and the student), as well as peer support and friendship, emerge strongly from the analysis as motivating factors for attending education. The research participants described their learning pathways in second chance provisions, which were designed mainly to support the acquisition of self-efficacy, career adaptability and career management skills. In addition, research participants pointed out the important influence of the length of time spent in second chance, which led them to continue their careers in further education and/or in the labour market. Committed partnerships between supportive professionals, like teachers, social workers and career professionals, and an encouraging teaching-learning environment,

proved to be crucial. This emerged as particularly important for helping students prepare for future challenges with their career transitions and development. Not only were these themes common across the country contexts, but the availability of supportive professionals depended, in part, on the given country context. For example, the former Hungarian students had never met any career professionals.

Based on the results of the research, this chapter argues that second chance provision is unique and, despite being embedded in different policy contexts, cultivates similar features such as: an open, flexible and secure environment; a tolerant, diverse and egalitarian culture; the application of diverse teaching methods; and peer-to-peer support. In addition, the most successful characteristics which were identified by the research participants concerning the nature of second chance education are highlighted: most importantly, the qualities and characteristics of the teachers, counsellors and mentors; flexible pedagogical methods applied in a diverse learning environment; and the role of peers in the second chance community. In the closing section of this chapter, the impact of second chance education is described, including how students are motivated and inspired to work efficiently as a team, as well as given the opportunity to obtain a qualification.

## **7.2 The main characteristics of second chance provision**

As the three sites chosen for this research represent different forms of second chance provision that are influenced by the given country's policy context, they play different roles in the education system. The detailed institutional and policy context of the institutions that were involved in the research are described in Chapter 4. Details about the key features of the three types of provision follow.

In Denmark, the operation of the huge variety of youth schools is traditionally the local government's responsibility, specifically that of the Education and Childcare Department. The department has a duty to care for young people aged 14 to 25 who are deemed not ready for the transition from lower secondary education (end of Year 9 in the comprehensive school) to upper secondary education, or who have dropped out of secondary education. The youth schools always adapt to students' and to local needs by providing versatile full-time or part-time study programmes. Thus, these second chance provisions (known as Support School and New Pathways) are part of the package of preventative and compensatory measures in the Danish policy context that support young people's return to learning, and help them take the exams and obtain the qualifications relevant to further studies or finding a job. In contrast, in the Hungarian system for those students who do not fit into mainstream education for many different reasons, there are only a few dedicated schools that provide support, with limited targeted funding from the government. One of these schools is the Helping School, which supports those who have left school early, aged 16 to 25. Unfortunately, the uncertainty surrounding its funding mechanisms have placed the sustainability of the institution and the organisation that runs it in jeopardy. Helping Schools' main professional mission is person-centred teaching that helps youngsters obtain the skills and the secondary school leaving certificate (matriculation: equivalent to GCSE) necessary for getting the right career. Finally, in England, Landing College is a further education college that offers different courses, second chance and bridging programmes, such as the Prince's Trust, Volunteering and Life Skills Programmes, as well as apprenticeship schemes. On these programmes, students aged 16 to 25 can improve their confidence and ability to decide on a career path. As part of their individual learning programme, students go on work placements to experience the world of work.



In summary, the Danish second chance programmes have created alternative learning contexts that are adapted to students' different needs immediately after comprehensive school to help smooth the transition to secondary education. As can be seen in Chapter 5, the policy context makes it possible to adapt flexibly to students and local needs within a short period of time. For instance, there were at least six second chance programmes targeted at different groups of students in Øresund City that provided students with a wide variety of tailor-made programmes after the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (the last compulsory year of comprehensive education) in 2013 when I started data collection. However, the profile of three programmes slightly changed, and a completely new one was introduced due to the needs of the student intake in 2014. In order to identify the most suitable path, students are led by guidance counsellors from the beginning of Year 8. Therefore, according to the findings (see more detail in Chapters 4 and 5), more structured professional support is available to Danish students that is specifically designed to prevent students dropping out of secondary education compared to the other two participating countries. However, it should be noted that both the Hungarian and the English second chance programmes provide alternatives to students who are mostly older than the majority of the Danish at-risk cohort, and typically have experienced more failures, including dropping out of the education system several times (see more detail in Chapters 4 and 5). One reason for this that emerged from the interview analysis is the existence of a supported transition from initial to secondary education that is supported by guidance counsellors.

### **7.3 Similarities of second chance provisions**

Despite being embedded in different country contexts, second chance programmes have a number of similar features, as illustrated by the interviews that were conducted with former

students from the three countries under investigation. These features are associated with a flexible and safe environment, egalitarian and diverse cultures, and various diverse teaching methods. They are described in this section, with indications of how they transformed research participants' negative attitudes to schooling into positive mind-sets related to learning, and more responsiveness to teachers. The research participants' narratives from all the three countries highlighted the importance of the '*cosiness*' and '*warmth*' of the educational institution they attended.

### **7.3.1 Encouraging teaching-learning environment**

Social constructionists argue that the career development of individuals can only be understood within the broader context of their lives. For example, systems theory framework (STF) (McMahon, 2002) takes a systems approach to understanding career development. From an analysis of participants' experiences of second chance education, the importance of an *encouraging teaching-learning environment* emerged strongly. This assists our understanding of how these programmes motivated students disillusioned by mainstream education to develop their skills and competences and achieve future career goals. Most participants reported that they felt safe to experiment with learning for the first time because of the supportive and tolerant climate. For instance, Ali (25, male, migrant background, DK) explained why Support School had made him re-engage with learning:

I only got sick like once, because we were dedicated to that school. So, they taught us a lot and they said that I had some potential to learn. Especially at Support School, what I liked most were the teachers, and of course the students, everything was going so well because everyone wanted to help you. So weird people like me go there, and you are accepted, you see that, and then I started learning everything, and being more

active focussing on my future. Like I felt I have to do better than I did before, and then all my exams went pretty well.

Other participants from the three countries under consideration also emphasised the role of a learning climate where understanding and knowledge were much more significant than achieving a high grade/pass mark. István (39, male, Hun) said:

I thought I'd never understand a word of Maths ... I'd failed so many times in other schools and was nervous in the first two Maths lessons at Support School... but there was background music in class which made me relaxed ... and everything was explained by Papposz [the Maths teacher] until I understood the task.

A number of participants from the English and Danish cohorts also praised the advantages of the learning-oriented climate in which there was less competition between classmates. Due to its encouraging nature, this climate helped five research participants with dyslexia face and combat their challenges in a process of learning that was supported by their teachers. Thus, in learning-oriented climates created in second chance provision, the typical focus on competition was replaced by an approach of fostering learning goals by rewarding understanding (Jackson, 2016). Jackson (2106) and Senko and colleagues (2011) defined learning goals as part of a subjective learning process, involving gaining more understanding and new skills. According to the participants, the evaluation of their performance also made them active agents because they had the chance to get engaged in this process. For instance, in England and Denmark students complete portfolios that comprise all of the students' work from a semester or academic year, in addition to reflecting on their learning with their teachers. In Hungary, exam results are thoroughly discussed with each student at the end of each semester in the exam period, with an analysis of the student's strengths and weaknesses with a view to setting new targets and learning goals for the next semester. Students' sense of responsibility for their achievements is increased by following this procedure, which is based

on success-oriented pedagogy that strengthens their sense of efficiency (Brynaa & Johansen, 2010).

Emphasising the positive and motivating advantages of the encouraging environment, in the interviews research participants mentioned the differences between their previous school and their second chance programme, referring to the advantages of second chance (for instance, the ways in which social relationships in second chance learning cultures contribute to students' re-engagement with learning). Kirsty (26, female, Eng) described the advantages of a programme located at Landing College, and how she became more enthusiastic and determined under supportive circumstances:

That the former school was one where just no one listened to you, you were just another person there 'coz it's so big. And when we came to Prince's Trust everyone was friends, the tutors were our friends. Everyone was so close and it was so much nicer in this environment with friendly people than being ignored. So we had Mick and Julie and three helpers, and obviously there were people behind the scenes as well that we rarely saw. We had to do a portfolio of work. I did it and everything else with the best of my knowledge, so if I had not done that I wouldn't be here right where I am. Every time I went in obviously, I felt really happy and safe in college. I felt I didn't want to go home because it was something that I wanted to carry on doing.

In line with this, researchers (Jephcote & Salisbury, 2007; Gallacher, 2007) also considered college life to be beneficial for students, as social relationships in learning cultures in community-based settings support students' re-engagement with learning. According to James and Biesta (2007), the same tendency can be found in some learning cultures, as well as in VET, that motivates students to go beyond their former aspirations. The authors argue that learning cultures are developed from interactions between different agents, such as peers and student-staff members, that build up expectations and experiences.

Participants of this research also outlined the significant role of the interactions with the members of staff of the second chance communities. These interactions gave participants a new drive to reengage with learning in a youth-friendly atmosphere. For instance, Roland (24, male, DK) talked about the importance of his uplifting conversations with some members of staff, whose friendly attitudes to students contributed to a feeling of being comfortable and him being '*ready to learn*' in a second chance learning environment:

There was also this old man who just worked as a repairman, he was talking with us in such a kindly way, and always made the first coffee and tea ready for us. So, we came in the mornings and then just sat down drinking a cup of tea or coffee, it was always funny speaking with him, and just having a great time together basically, and he would also be there in the lunch breaks. So he really did do something for the atmosphere in the school. And then there's also a person, I think, she was called Carla who works in the office and also down in the canteen, so she was also there creating a great atmosphere, and basically every day when people came to school we felt awesome.

Similarly to Roland's positive narrative, when other research participants from the three countries were asked about their experiences of everyday-life in second chance provision, they reported that they felt safe in their communities, enjoying the '*safety net*' created by students and staff. Some comments about the role of second chance provision include: '*it was more like my home*', '*it inspired me to come and learn*', '*a kind of family*', '*a place to laugh and learn*' and '*a place to discover yourself through creativity*'. Several participants described the second chance provision in unique ways, which represented the openness of the learning environment. According to the interviews with research participants, this theme was consistent across all three countries.

### 7.3.2 Tolerant, diverse and egalitarian culture

Participants described the culture of the different second chance provision as '*friendly*' and '*democratic*', where everyone felt equal and brave enough to discover and to express themselves. Most of them acknowledged that this was the first educational setting in their school careers where they had not felt alienated or excluded, and they believed that their second chance community was not discriminative. Moreover, participants claimed that their '*weirdness*', '*irregularity*' or '*deviance*' – as they self-identified – was a kind of shared feeling among them, which created the power of cohesion and tolerance in their second chance communities. As one of the Hungarian participants, Kriszti (28, female, Hun) said: 'We all ended up here for a reason ... you see, none of us was perfect, we did not fit into the picture, that's why we were here.' There were a wide variety of reasons why these participants attended second chance programmes, including talent, learning difficulties, dyslexia, behavioural problems, identity issues and deviance.

In Denmark, participants with migrant backgrounds particularly appreciated the tolerant and equal attitude towards them at the Support School, because, prior to the second chance class, they had experienced exclusion or sometimes racist comments in mainstream education. For instance, Ali (25, male, migrant background, DK) summarised his positive initial experiences of second chance provision:

Anyway, we went there to see the intro [for the desired course], and it caught our attention that they were good people, I saw good in them, they were good, they didn't discriminate against us for what we were ...

Amir (23, male, migrant background, DK) also emphasised the importance of acceptance: 'The difference was more like the community at Support School. Everyone spoke to each

other; everyone was different in a way and equal. There was no hate; there was nothing I saw like in other places ...’

Most of the Hungarian participants highlighted the importance of the tolerant and egalitarian culture of the Helping School where they felt acknowledged and accepted for the first time. Additionally, in some extreme cases the Helping School was the only chance they had to attend secondary school and socialise with peers. For instance, Tímea (37, female, Hun) had been imprisoned for five years because as a student nurse she had helped elderly people to die (active euthanasia) in a hospital. In her last two years in prison she joined a GCSE course led by the teachers of the Helping School. After her release, she attended the Helping School as a full-time student, which was confusing and frustrating for her at the beginning. Luckily, her support teacher convinced her to talk about her experiences of imprisonment to her peers, which immediately built bridges. She was so surprised when the others listened to her carefully and raised many attentive questions. She said:

... they were much younger and open, we smoked outside during the break and a guy asked what I had done before Support School, and I told him I had been in prison, and they became more curious. I remember one of them said: “no worries, I was a drug-dealer”, and they accepted me. I think some of them respected me for all of the effort I had made, and honestly, without them I could not have made it, I would not have had the courage. I received so much help from my mates to get back to my family and to society. (Tímea, 37, female, Hun).

Likewise, an ECORYS survey (Day et al, 2013) also presented evidence that one of the strengths of second chance programmes is a friendly and tolerant learning environment where students feel acknowledged and are treated equally. In this tolerant and egalitarian culture, students experience success and acceptance; moreover, some of them feel these important sensations for the first time in their school careers.

Regarding the diverse student intakes in the tolerant and egalitarian cultures under consideration, it is worth mentioning some thought-provoking elements that emerged from the interviews with some of the Danish and Hungarian participants from high socioeconomic status (SES) groups; namely, their parents' reactions to their determination to attend second chance programmes. As McMahon (2002) states in the STF, in order to understand individuals' career trajectories, individuals must be viewed in the context of their lives. Thus, the first reaction of parents with high SES was that these schools were stigmatising because of the diverse intake of the second chance provision and they questioned the efficiency of time spent there. For instance, one Danish student, Christian (40, male, DK) said: 'They [his parents] thought I would not fit in with those problematic kids, and would never finish gymnasium [Danish secondary school].' Another student, Kriszti (32, female, Hun) said: 'Mum was a bit worried that Support School was not high-standard, so I would never go to a uni like the others did in the family.' Later, these participants mentioned that after seeing positive changes in their performance, attitude to learning and in their behaviour, their parents acknowledged that the choice of second chance provision had been a good decision.

As discussed above, the diverse student intake in each provision had established a democratic community where students and teachers shaped rules on an equal footing. At the Helping School, for instance, students and teachers regularly gather together in the assembly hall, where everybody has to be present for 30 minutes to discuss issues related to the life of the second chance provision. The accepting nature of the school made participants recognise and appreciate the diversity of the student population, and furthermore, the importance of stopping stereotyping. It was this diversity that made second chance provision unique. Additionally, the Hungarian participants pointed out that, unlike in several mainstream educational settings where diversity is not appreciated, in the Helping School all minority groups (e.g. gay and Roma people) are welcomed and respected. This position was



exemplified by Anett (24, female, Hun), a former drug-addict who sketched out the diverse population of the Helping School and explained how these various characters lived and worked together harmoniously in a tolerant environment. She said:

[A] friendly family circus where you can study. I'd say it's a bit surreal when you first enter, there are different people in the assembly room eating and drinking coffee, for example, you can see a punk, a gypsy, a gay person and a skinhead on the couch chatting peacefully, so it is a place where you can freely express yourself.

In the Danish cohort, Oscar (23, male, DK) gave a picturesque account of the great diversity of people at the Support School. Before he joined the Support School he had attempted to commit suicide. Support School was the first place where he felt himself to be a member of an accepting and equal community:

Support School is a school of graffiti and equality. If you want to imagine Support School you can put some people in front of a wall, which is full of graffiti, then you put a boy dressed up like a cowboy, and you put another boy with a skateboard and some gangsters, shy guys and a creepy girl, and some beautiful ones, and the teachers, and Ulla [the guidance counsellor] would be in the middle, and finally me in the back, chilling.

These selected examples of participants' experiences clearly demonstrate how youth-friendly and egalitarian learning cultures that differ from traditional educational settings encourage students to open up and to socialise. Moreover, these learning cultures illustrate how motivational they can be for students who are disillusioned with the traditional education system.

## **7.4 The most significant characteristics of second chance provision**

Research participants from the three countries were asked to describe the characteristics of second chance provision that were the most important for ensuring their educational success in re-entering education. Their responses can be grouped into three clusters: the qualities and characteristics of the teachers, counsellors and mentors; flexible pedagogical methods applied in a diverse learning environment; and the role of peers in the second chance community. According to the former students' responses, these clusters can be considered country-independent. Each of these will now be discussed.

### **7.4.1 Supportive professionals**

The data analysis revealed that the most influential theme related to student retention was the role of *encouraging, dedicated teachers and other staff members* in second chance education. Former students emphasised that teachers in the second chance provisions had paid special attention to their individual personalities. With their openness and commitment to young people, teachers in the second chance provisions believe that their mission is to adapt to meet students' needs. The limited class size of the second chance programmes enables teachers to build close relationships with students based on trust, equality and respect (Schmitsek, 2010).

With the aim of finding out what significant attributes, aptitudes and skills are needed to work effectively as a teacher in a second chance programme, interviews were conducted with school management at the three research sites. The findings of these interviews suggest that teachers working in second chance provision have to fulfil complex roles, in addition to knowing the subject area that is taught. Among other skills, they have to understand young people and adapt to their needs appropriately. They agreed that the teachers' personality is a

key to success, and some attributes were specified by all, including: '*patience*', '*flexibility*', and '*a good sense of humour*'. The Danish principal said that: 'teachers need passion for young people'. They referred to teachers as working in a multi-faceted role, saying: 'Actually, our teachers are called helping teachers, and the complexity of their roles is even emphasised in their contracts.'

Similarly, former students from all three countries expressed that one of the essential factors for their success in rebuilding confidence, self-efficacy and returning to education was the role of their second chance teachers, who made them feel acknowledged and listened to. They emphasised that the teachers' open minds and warm, positive attitudes to students helped them to fully trust the school staff compared with previous school experiences. As Ali (25, male, migrant background, DK) said:

'So, mostly the difference [between the previous schools and Support School] is the teachers, you can see that. I saw good in them. I could trust them. The teachers improve the atmosphere and encourage you a lot. If it wasn't for the teachers, I would have experienced maybe almost the same things I had experienced at the other schools.'

Another Danish student, Amir (24, male, migrant background, DK), who was expelled from a secondary school due to disruptive behaviour and drug misuse, had never found teachers in mainstream education to be friendly. In Support School, second chance teachers were open and sympathetic, which made him interested in schooling. He claimed:

It was like, you know, the teachers are not that hard: they are good people. If you do something bad, then they just forgive you, they don't f..ck up your life, they don't say now you are out of school, they just try to make you love school (Amir, 24, male, migrant background, DK).

According to the research participants from the three countries, the most significant characteristics and attributes of second chance provision teachers were their encouraging, sympathetic and kind nature; helpfulness; open-mindedness; and their youth-friendly, motivational and dedicated personality. One of the Hungarian participants, Balázs (32, male, Hun), who was expelled from three mainstream schools because of behavioural and drug issues, described second chance teachers' personalities as follows: '... their personalities were kind of, for me, stronger, or more cool, or what should I say? They are encouraging and kind, and it seems that besides being teachers they also took a personal interest.'

As indicated earlier, second chance provision teachers '*took a personal interest*', referring to their interest in building an equal and friendly relationship with students. In order to make disillusioned students motivated and confident, these relationships are considered essential in second chance provision. Some reserved participants mentioned in the interviews that these supportive and encouraging student-teacher relationships felt as close as those encountered in families, and some teachers were even described as '*parent figure[s]*'. For example, one Danish participant, Karl-Georg (26, male, DK) revealed that his drama teacher had helped him open up and become a good achiever through the supportive relationship they had at the Support School. He even considered her a mother figure:

Especially, I had a teacher called Sophie who taught drama and she was totally cool, she was kind of a mini version of a 'bonus' mother, so she tried to respect that I was kind of a bit geeky and didn't want to socialise, and she tried to help me and gave me some kind of inspirational messages.

Some other participants, mainly from divorced or troubled families, emphasised that the closeness of teachers' personalities reminded them of a good family. It was especially at Landing College at the Prince's Trust where the course tutors, one female and one male, were

considered family. One student, Jessica (23, female, Eng), who was suffering mild depression as a result of her parents' divorce, expressed her enthusiasm about the tutors' closeness and their youth-friendly personality. For instance, she said:

Well, Mick and Julie were just like family. They were that close to you. They were just family, they were there all the time when you needed them. You know, all the time you turn around and they could be there waiting for you. It's really nice to have the support that they gave us because like I said, they're friends, they are not, they weren't like adults, they weren't like tutors, so they encouraged me, and then I keep going obviously. They were just always there (Jessica, 23, female, Eng).

Danish participants also considered their teachers' friendliness, closeness and equal attitudes towards students to be significant and inspirational. As one participant, Sophie (23, female, DK) expressed: *'The teachers were a big inspiration'*. Additionally, compared with the participants of the other two countries, the Danish respondents suggested that their teachers' creative personalities were also a very important factor in motivating students and focussing their attention. They also believed that teachers should set an example. As one participant, Magnus (28, male, DK), a keen musician, said:

The teachers made our choice [after Folkeskole] easier because they were great musicians, you could feel that they had so much creativity, so they could teach you more music. And we had the best teachers in the world I think, we were very-very happy. They were like our friends. We still talk and meet them occasionally.

According to a number of scholars in the field, the personality and approaches adopted by second chance provision teachers to teaching and learning is significant. For instance, Schiffers (2010) argues that in second chance provision teachers have to combat students' negative experiences that they have picked up in mainstream education, which is achieved by

adapting their teaching style to meet young people's needs. In order to do this, teachers should be friendly, flexible and creative in building a trusting and positive relationship with students (Schiffers, 2010). Furthermore, Brynaa and Johansen (2010) also draw attention to the importance of flexibility and creativity and the importance of taking individual needs into consideration in second chance provision.

The support staffs' personalities and characteristics (such as their encouragement and dedication) were also emphasised by research participants as making a positive impact on students' everyday lives. In the Danish cohort, Support School's '*helpful*' guidance counsellors were praised, especially by those with disadvantaged backgrounds, for helping them deal with everyday life issues. As one participant, Aisha (23, female, DK), said:

My guidance counsellor was one of the best I've had, because she was helpful as hell. She was open-minded and helped me a lot through my education, she even gave her word. So my counsellor was so kind and was taking her job seriously, and you can probably ask anyone else in that school, and they would all answer the same.

Another participant, Fleming (24, male, DK), who was a looked-after child at Support School, considered the guidance counsellor to be a mother figure because she helped him through challenges he faced as an orphan:

Ulla, she liked me a lot, and she knows I'm like just trying to survive, so she liked me and she was like protecting me from the bad things, because she's a good person. If there was a problem, she really helped me because she knew I'm not that good in Danish and stuff and she helped me a lot with papers, applications. (Fleming, 24, male, DK)

In the Hungarian cohort, some younger participants talked about '*kind and helpful*' social workers. This supporting role was introduced in the Helping School nine years ago. Prior to

this, teachers covered the social worker's responsibilities. The younger participants highlighted that the role of the social worker was essential, since she acted as an intermediary for careers advice, and for information about higher education, the labour market and the social security system. One of the participants, Zoltán (26, male, Hun) disclosed:

I could not live with my alcoholic dad anymore, so I moved to a small flat, and I was only 18. Bea [social worker], who was kind and easy to trust, told me how to get registered with the new GP and stuff, and at the end of my studies she helped me find an IT course in adult education.

However, the English cohort put greater emphasis on the importance of the multi-disciplinary team operating at Landing College rather than one particular role. The supportive professionals' generous, youth-friendly tolerant nature and helpfulness were evident from the participants' narratives, illustrating how these aptitudes helped build trust. For solving multi-faceted problems, trust in professionals is a key element in young people's lives. One of the stories illustrates how helpful professionals can reflect on complex problems. Kirsty (28, female, Eng) said:

I had so many issues with mum, we argued a lot, so Julie [the tutor] sent me to the counselling team, and I kept going there every week for the whole year. Ann [from the counselling team] was very patient and friendly, a very nice woman, so it was easy to open up. Later, I hadn't got the faintest idea [regarding careers] where to go after the V-programme, so I went to see the lady at the careers desk. She was really helpful and interested in me, what I wanted, she was funny and kind and asked questions to find a good course for me.

Overall, building a trusting and friendly relationship between participants, second chance teachers and other professionals helped participants acquire knowledge and create a more

positive attitude towards education and the adult world. This supports other findings in the relevant literature. For example, research into vocational education and training also emphasised the important role of tutor-student relationships in knowledge acquisition, together with the social and affective dimension to learning for at-risk students (Nash, 2008). According to earlier research, improving students' relationships with school staff was found to have beneficial and long-lasting effects on students' academic and social development (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2016). Additionally, these authors also pointed out that those students who have close and supportive relationships with their teachers will achieve more academically and socially than those students who have more conflict in their relationships.

To sum up, school staff members who are generous and show patience and who have a student-friendly attitude can make strong personal connections with their students. This has been found to be achieved through frequent conversations and by giving more constructive guidance and praise rather than critical remarks. Students who trust staff members are more likely to engage in social relationships and learning in an educational setting.

#### **7.4.2 Flexible pedagogic methods applied in a diverse learning environment**

Data analysis revealed that flexible pedagogical methods applied in second chance provision were considered a significant factor in encouraging students to re-engage with learning. Former students highlighted the importance of second chance teachers' methodological preparedness, reflectivity and openness to adapting to students' needs. Additionally, the individual study pathways and the limited class size of the programmes helped young people who previously suffered failures to catch up, and to overcome under-developed social competences (Schmitsek, 2010). For example, a number of participants from the Danish and Hungarian cohorts highlighted the wide variety of methods applied by mathematics teachers



to explain rules and equations which had not been learnt in previous schools. They praised the teachers' tailor-made methods that helped students learn. For instance, a Danish participant, Karl-Georg (27, male, DK) adored his Maths teacher's teaching methods which motivated him to become a '*nerd*' – as he defined himself – at Helping School. He put emphasis on the teacher's personal approach to teaching:

Their teaching methods were different. They kind of involved a little bit of their own private lives into the students' lives, they tried to help us out, and actually for me it was the biggest transformation maths-wise, because I became very good at it. I embraced his teachings, he was very good and he could answer all kinds of mystical questions.

The personal approach to teaching was defined as teachers talking openly about their experiences and stories or by showing an interest in their students' everyday learning. This person-centred approach was noted by research participants from all three contexts under consideration. For instance, a powerful story about one teacher's personal involvement was revealed by a Danish participant, Tolge (26, male, migrant background, DK). Tolge's teacher went to the gym with him to exercise after he was diagnosed with a slipped disc. The teacher wanted to support and help Tolge's recovery and help him continue his course on truck driving, as with a slipped disc Tolge might have had to withdraw from the course.

Related to the personal approach followed by second chance teachers, there were clear examples in the participants' interviews of how teachers were considered role models. As one of the participants, Ali (25, male, migrant background, DK) from Denmark said:

So she's like one of my role models. If I wanna become an English teacher, she is one of my role models, definitely. Because I want to be more like her: open minded, happy, improvising, and always speak English properly, so people learn what they are

supposed to learn. She made English look like: hey, it's play time. Let's have some fun, and we spoke a lot of English in the class, not like some other classes in whatever schools, they speak Danish, and then English, so they speak like uh. She only spoke Danish when it was a necessity. I think that's mostly about it, about a role model, and she, like the other teachers, treated me like a human being for the first time. Ali (25, male, migrant background, DK)

Likewise, there was another story from Denmark where second chance teachers set a good example and became role models for one student who had been expelled from 12 primary schools because of his unacceptable and disruptive behaviour. For example, when he was aggressive, teachers sat down and talked instead of just kicking him out or arguing with him. They had analysed the trigger mechanisms and why he reacted aggressively, so that they understood him and were better able to help him. They gave him examples of how he could have reacted, thereby demonstrating other ways to behave. As he said: 'Teachers here taught me how to be kind and gentle to people' Mohammed (26, male, DK).

As illustrated above, the role of teachers in second chance provision is crucial for adapting to students' needs through the use of flexible methods that motivate students and deal with their particular educational support needs that are not accommodated in mainstream education. In line with this, Katznelson and colleagues (2015) argue that motivation is associated with what students have brought from past experiences, what they are motivated to do, and how they are motivated under different circumstances. These processes make an impact on students' engagement in knowledge acquisition and their motivation (Katznelson et al., 2015). Therefore, motivation can be considered a significant factor in determining students' attitudes to learning within their school career. Katznelson and colleagues (2016) presume that motivation is differentiated, contextual and contingent. The research participants' narratives also emphasised that adaptivity in the teaching-learning process and the creation of

individual study pathways. This, combined with flexible teaching methods in second chance provision, increased their motivation and positive attitudes towards learning and supported the development of positive mindsets compared to previous school experiences. For instance, Jakob (25, male, DK) summarised why he felt motivated to learn at Support School after he had experienced so many failures and become disillusioned in previous schools. He emphasised the role of flexible and tailor-made teaching methods in the process of knowledge acquisition:

What was really great about the school was that there was time for yourself. You could, when you were in maths class, try to do problem solving. You could say to Peter [the Maths teacher], “Hey, can I go to the next room to work alone?” He was there helping us and we were just sitting and could talk and have some fun, maybe eating crackers and drinking some tea while doing this problem solving. (25, male, DK)

Correspondingly, Bimrose and colleagues (2016) draw attention to the significant role of increasing the motivation for education and training of students whose poor performance was due to poor motivation in mainstream education. To sum up, according to literature and the research participants’ experiences of schooling, the nature of the provision should adapt to individual needs to make students more willing to take part in education. In addition, the characteristics of motivational second chance provision in terms of teachers who adapt to students’ needs through the use of flexible and motivating methods stand out from the research participants’ interviews from all the three countries.

### **7.4.3 The role of peers**

As indicated above, values defined by the participants of second chance provision, including respect, equality, tolerance and trust, shape a friendly and motivating atmosphere where

students feel acknowledged and responsible. According to the participants' interviews from the three countries, the creation of this atmosphere and the focus on students' well-being was important. Another significant part of second chance provision that was felt to have a positive impact was the role of peers and peer support. For instance, some participants from the English cohort talked about the power of being with similar people working on tasks or towards the same goal, and making friends and feeling supported. During their courses, students had many platforms where they could be surrounded by peers and feel motivated, supported and, sometimes, involved in friendly competition to challenge themselves further. For instance, at Landing College in the Prince's Trust, students underwent team-building activities to get to know each other at the beginning of their course. Jessica (23, female, Eng) enthusiastically shared her thoughts about the positive effects of team building experienced with her peers:

I got there and obviously when I first met everyone we made friends instantly. Everyone was friends there, absolutely everyone. At the beginning I fitted in straight away, and then a week after that we went away on a trip. So, we were loaded with team building exercises because we needed to all know each other. It was really fun. The first night we went out playing in the snow. We did really good exercises throughout the week, we did like rock climbing; we did all sorts of different things to become a kind a family ... (23, female, Eng)

In other stories, participants mentioned how supportive it was to lean on their peers when they were pessimistic or depressed, and when it seemed that goals were unachievable. Additionally, they also felt that their peers' belief contributed to their self-esteem and well-being and ability to not give up on their studies. For instance, one research participant from the English cohort, April (32, female, Eng), was a single mother in her late twenties who was

desperate to get a qualification and who had enrolled on a voluntary programme. During the programme she was faced with bereavement when she lost her grandfather, who had raised her. She gave an account of how she felt accepted and supported by her peers in the voluntary programme community:

I felt good because they were in similar situation as me, I could relate to them, and I felt they could approach me, which helped me build my confidence 'cos I was accepted as a single mum. Actually, they helped me a lot, because while on a course, I lost my granddad, I took it really hard. Yes, they just supported me mentally by just saying I can do it, just supported me like looking after my little boy, while I'm getting hours, and things like that. (32, female, Eng)

A number of participants claimed that peers in second chance provision helped identify others' roles and to map out social skills and boundaries in the class. Christian (38, male, DK) called himself '*the active force of his class*'. He talked about his experiences in Support School:

And that school was really like the environment telling you that you set your own limits and everyone was supportive and good. So I was an active force in the class, I was the director of a big play, so we had rehearsals. Some guys were a bit lazy and didn't have any money, they were smoking a lot of weed, so I just said "we can't rehearse our scenes because there are four guys who don't turn up at 9 o'clock". And then I picked them up in the morning, so I took my bike, rang the doorbell and we were there on time. So, I did that because it was very important to me, and then to them, too. (38, male, DK)

Some participants emphasised how motivating it was to work with like-minded peers in the process of knowledge acquisition rather than working alone. They acknowledged that it was inspiring to discover how people could approach the same problem differently. For instance, when a particular task seemed overwhelming they got inspiration from their peers. Fanni (37, female, Hun) described how her motivation towards learning had changed in Helping School due to peer support:

I asked lots of questions and the teachers answered them even after class. There were days when we stayed at school until 8pm in the assembly room working on Maths exercises, drinking tea and eating biscuits, because we wanted to solve and understand the problem – there were even Saturdays when I organised study afternoons with my mates. (37, female, Hun)

The research participants' narratives underpin the importance of peers and peer social capital in finding a sense of belonging to a learning community, which – according to my findings – was beneficial for the research participants' social and academic development and might have contributed to student retention. The significant role of peer social capital (namely, how young people themselves create social capital) in students' well-being and in valuing the schooling that influences students' efforts has been discussed by a number of researchers (Jørgensen, 2011, 2017; Ryabov, 2009). They (Jørgensen, 2011, 2017; Ryabov, 2009) who also claim that social capital is the result of engaging in peer groups, which have definite norms, expectations and values. In practice, values, norms and expectations were mainly defined by the learning community in the second chance provision where observations took place. The dynamics in the process of setting norms was influenced by peer social capital, which contributed to positive attitudes to learning, not only to the community, but also to society. In addition, there were some other factors that motivated research participants to become active agents in learning and in their social life, such as friendship networks and

cooperation with peers that helped the former find their place in the given learning community. In this respect, it can be argued that peer social capital – according to the literature (Jørgensen, 2011, 2017), as well as my own research findings – appears to contribute to psychological well-being and social inclusion.

## **7.5 The impact of second chance provision**

The research participants were asked to reflect on the potential impact second chance provision might have had on their school careers. Their responses can be grouped into two clusters, with the impact of second chance provision evident at two levels: The first is the personal level, including motivation, gaining and/or rebuilding confidence, forming an identity, and becoming aware that their future is their responsibility. Second is at the academic level; namely, gaining knowledge, skills and qualification in second chance provision. An exploration of these two clusters follows.

### **7.5.1 Personal factors**

The most emotional part of each interview occurred when former students were asked how they had most benefitted from the length of time they had spent in the given second chance provision. Some were reduced to tears, explaining how grateful they were to their teachers and related professionals and to their peers as well for supporting and accompanying them, and most of them defined the time as a *'life-changing experience'*. Research participants' answers varied greatly in terms of the depth of impact made by each second chance provision, significantly reflecting on the given country's policy context. In order to provide a broader picture of the differences that occurred in the individual life trajectories, some features of each country context should be mentioned (see more details in Chapters 4 and 5).

More precisely, in the Danish narratives it was evident that young people are aware of the advantages of the Danish welfare system, and of what they are entitled to in that system (SU, youth guidance centre, job centre, etc.). Therefore, they considered the role of their second chance provision in their life trajectories mainly as a forum for self-development. By contrast, in the English narratives research participants were less informed about institutional responses to their everyday difficulties, so they relied on the tutors and related professionals of Landing College who dealt with issues that could have been arranged by external agents, such as career guidance, family difficulties and accommodation. The most challenging scenarios emerged from the Hungarian research participants' narratives, where the dysfunctionality or lack of external agents was often experienced, with some participants talking about being '*lost in the system*'. The Helping School was used to replace many professional services for helping young people deal with a wide range of multi-faceted problems, including severe addiction, homelessness, (mental) health-related issues and financial difficulties.

Across all three contexts, as a country-independent theme, participants felt that second chance provision had made a significant impact on them at a personal level, more specifically, in terms of gaining and/or rebuilding confidence, forming an identity, and becoming aware that their future was their responsibility. The most significant of these factors was gaining and/or rebuilding confidence; only three participants did not mention this out of the total of 28 participants across the three countries. Participants emphasised the strategically crucial role of their teachers and peers in the process of gaining and/or rebuilding confidence which had motivated them to go on to perform better in school, to achieve their goals, and to become autonomous later in their careers. For instance, Andreas (34, male, DK) from the Danish cohort talked about how his teachers' encouragement contributed to him having belief in himself:



I don't know if they were speaking the truth, but the teachers were very good at trying to make you believe in yourself. I experienced everything, it was such a personal year of development for me also as a person, as someone who was about to grow up. I gained confidence and experience by playing with other people in groups and having a social life and music also, so there were a lot of benefits in that. I suppose it helped me broaden my horizons a bit about what I wanted to do. (34, male, DK)

Similarly, Ali (25, male, DK), another Danish participant, also explained how participation in Support School contributed to his confidence, which was so important to his future career:

What did I receive? I received confidence; I received high expectations about myself, because now I can set standards. I always thought, if I can get these grades once, that means I can get them again, and I can maybe do better. I made friends, I even found a role model. (25, male, DK)

Participants from the English cohort also emphasised that they had gained confidence by the end of their course, in addition to improved communication and social skills. This had resulted in productive teamwork in the classroom and in more friendships and connections with the adult world. Due to these skills, one participant, Jessica (23, female, Eng) felt that she could integrate into college life and could grow to be a responsible person:

I personally believe that I developed a lot, because before that I didn't work, I had never had a job, and I never really met anyone new. I went from being like a child to an adult during that period of time. After that I hit reality, I hit adult life, it made you a complete person. And then after the course I think I got lots of confidence actually, just decided to leave my mum 'cos I couldn't live with her anymore. And then I started to live with my dad, and I decided to study childcare after that course. (23, female, Eng)

Overall, self-confidence that was either rebuilt or newly developed had a significant effect on school performance, attitudes towards learning, and on wide variety of relationships inside the given learning community and outside as well, like relations with external friends and family members. It also supported the choices leading to different future pathways, together with the transitions involved in following a chosen pathway, as well as performing well in the desired future career. All these factors can contribute to personal agency, which describes the extent to which individuals are autonomous and confident about their reengagement in education and later in life (Bandura, 2006). According to Coleman (2010), agency applies to the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices. He also argues that personal agency influences how people deal with major life choices and relationships, and how they make everyday decisions.

#### **7.5.1.1 Forming an identity**

The other country-independent factor that emerged from the research participants' interviews was identity formation. Thus, some research participants gave accounts of how they reformed and/or restored their identity (see, for example, Breakwell, 1983) in the given second chance provision. The most powerful two stories were from Noel and Hanna. Noel (25, transgender, male, Hun) started Helping School while transitioning to a new gender identity and finished the school with a new gender identity, a new name and ID, and after completing hormone therapy. He felt really touched about how the community of Helping School had encouraged him through this enormous transformation:

My support teacher advised me to do a presentation on the whole transgender thing for my peers to let them know what I had been through, and I said OK, and the presentation went pretty well. My peers had so many questions and encouraging

comments, it was so fantastic to be accepted for who I really was, and then they supported me, basically, held my hand through the whole chaos, and they were proud of me, really, they told me how brave I was. I think I scored full marks from them, it was a relief, I could be myself in a community without being bullied. (25, transgender, male, Hun)

Another touching account related to identity issues came from the English cohort, namely, Hannah (24, female, Eng), who was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome while studying on the voluntary programme. She was eager to talk about her life-changing experience and she immediately emailed me about having an interview when she received the letter with the details of my research from Landing College. This was the result of support she had received at the second chance provision about facing and accepting her diagnosis. For instance, Hannah said:

Well, honestly, I think the best experience was making friends, because at the time I was going through a very difficult period, because I had had an autism test and they found out that I had Asperger's syndrome. I wanted to tell the group but then I changed my mind because I didn't want them to think that I was different. You know, start treating me differently. But then I told a few of them and then everyone, and they were all like 'c'mon, there is nothing to worry about', they've stayed friends with me because they haven't judged me, they've accepted me, you know. So that's been the best experience from the whole course. (24, female, Eng)

Overall, the narratives presented in this section provide evidence across three country contexts of the significant role of second chance provision in many young people's lives. According to the interviewees, second chance provision provided them with positive and motivating experiences that helped them gain confidence, self-efficacy, skills and relationships, which subsequently helped them perform better in education. In addition,

research participants emphasised that they had benefitted from the length of time they had spent in the given second chance provision, explaining how grateful they were to their teachers and related professionals and to their peers as well for their support and accompaniment, as most of them defined their *'life-changing experience'*.

### **7.5.2 Academic factors**

Research participants from the three countries reported that, due to the increase in confidence, new skills, the encouraging teaching-learning environment, teachers' effort and peer-support, they had become motivated to learn. This had resulted in improved academic skills and marks. With improved academic skills, they could and had gained qualifications, which allowed them to go on to further studies, or to enter the world of work. They cherished this opportunity as *'it was the key to success'*, *'it saved my life'*, *'it broadened my horizons'*, and *'it opened doors'*. Regarding the qualifications they obtained, we have to take the characteristics of each second chance provision into consideration. For example, in Hungary students could gain matriculation (equivalent to GCSEs in England) as a basis for starting further or higher education. Whereas in Denmark students could get a leaving exam qualifying them to start traditional or mainstream secondary education (e.g. gymnasium, vocational training), and in England students could obtain different certificates (e.g. NVQ level 1) for continuing further education and/or a vocational training programmes (see more detail in Chapter 4). Consequently, Hungarian and Danish students have to pass exams in different academic subjects (e.g. Maths, Danish, Hungarian grammar/literature, a foreign language) to get a leaving certificate, whereas in the English scenario, the second chance provisions (volunteer programme, Prince's Trust) that are defined as 'bridge programmes' help students gain certificates based on skills development, etc. According to the Hungarian

and Danish students, all improved their academic grades and passed their exams, which contributed to their better position in secondary and/or higher education or in the labour market. It should also be mentioned, however, that a Hungarian research study (Hajdu et al, 2015) argues that the Hungarian secondary leaving certificate provides better opportunities for young people in the labour market compared to those who gain traditional vocational qualifications. The reason for this is that young people with a secondary leaving certificate could learn more flexible skills and obtain knowledge required in the volatile labour market, rather than their counterparts who obtain traditional vocational qualifications. Therefore, those with secondary leaving certificates are typically more successful, earn more and are less obliged to take up low-paid/low-skilled positions in the labour market (Hajdú et al, 2015; Zolnay, 2016).

In Denmark, Support School helped students to improve their academic skills in Maths, English and Danish, which was significant for those whose intention was to choose the traditional academic pathway, namely going to a gymnasium, after second chance provision. More specifically, some students with a migrant background found that a year spent in Support School was an important milestone in their career as they could improve their language skills so as to benefit from other opportunities in further studies. One participant, Ali (27, male, DK), talked enthusiastically about how second chance provision had made him motivated to study at a university:

But now I can apply to mostly any university I want to go to. I want to study like in other countries, I want to see the world as well, because now I've become so pumped up, I've got so much confidence, I've got so much happiness, I've got so much motivation only because of that spark, I had this spark and there was the flame. So, they [his teachers] fired me up in a kind of way. And I didn't have this spark to begin with. (27, male, DK)

Similarly, another participant from the Danish cohort, Stine (23, female, DK), described how she had become confident and gained strong academic skills in the year spent in Support School:

Yeah, I was more confident afterwards than I was before because of the teachers and how they taught, and it was making me more mature, ready for the big world, and I thanked all of the teachers because they helped me through. I had better grades in Maths and Danish, and then I started at a gymnasium.

Research participants from the Hungarian cohort also emphasised that they had significantly improved their academic skills and grades due to the flexible individual study pathways and adaptive teaching methods. Similarly, English research participants also gave accounts about their improved academic skills, especially in literacy, due to the activities and presentations they completed in the given programme, even though they did not have to take an exam at the end of their courses. For instance, Mary (27, female, Eng) praised the advantages of the encouraging and learning-oriented climate in which she could improve her literacy skills:

With my dyslexia, spelling has always been challenging and embarrassing for me, but here [Prince's Trust] I was helped by the tutors to face my challenges. There were hard-to-spell words on the walls and dictionaries on the shelves, and Mick told me how to benefit from using them. I could take time to practice reading and writing in classes.

Besides academic skills and achievements, all of the research participants from the three countries highlighted that their social skills had improved in the years spent in the given second chance provision.

In summary, the evidence presented in this section testifies to the enormous and significant effects that second chance provision has had on the research participants' lives. These effects

vary greatly, from helping someone become an actor (in the Danish cohort) to saving a heroin addict's life (in the Hungarian cohort). Regardless of the different outputs of the period of study that former students experienced in different second chance provision, it can be summarised that these provisions supported the development of academic and social skills, and moreover, generated '*life-changing opportunities*' – as most respondents put it.

## **7.6 Conclusions**

In this chapter, the positive experiences of research participants in different second chance provision environments in England, Denmark and Hungary were demonstrated. These narratives of 'success' were explored from the perspectives of participants who had been at risk of dropping out and/or who had dropped out of secondary education in the three national contexts. Participants expressed their admiration for their teachers and other professionals, and for their peers who had accepted and acknowledged them and helped create their own encouraging teaching-learning environment and community. They also testified to their own self-development, referencing the development and/or rebuilding of self-confidence that contributed to their awareness of their own responsibility for their futures. By listening to the voices of young people, the relevance and importance of personal support with special regard to positive relationships (such as those between the teacher and the student, the career guidance counsellor/mentor and the student), as well as peer support and friendship, as forms of motivation for attending education has been demonstrated.

## Chapter 8 After Second Chance

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces research participants' accounts of how they experienced the world of education and/or the world of work after having completed their studies in second chance provision. It also reflects on how experiences gained in second chance provision enriched their skills and developed their personalities. These supported them in re-engaging into mainstream education and/or transitioning to the labour market and making career choices, as well as functioning in their later careers.

From the analysis of their interviews, country-independent and country-dependent themes emerged. This chapter discusses three themes; the first, and most dominant, is labelled '*Life-changing experience*' and captures the positive effects of second chance provision in the research participants' careers and private lives. These effects provide students with support in terms of their becoming agents, and later authors, of their own lives and careers (Savickas, 2005). The first influential factor related to this theme that helped research participants define their future goals and careers was institutional support, which varied depending on the country context. The second influential factor related to this theme that improved in second chance provision in terms of supporting research participants' transition to the labour market was an improvement in skills and competences related to self-efficacy.

The second theme is significantly related to the first as it describes different walks of life and is thus named '*Successful career*'. It includes various career pathways and ambitious future plans. In order to describe how research participants became agents, and later authors of their own lives and careers (Savickas, 2005), individual life trajectories are introduced using four adapt-ability competences which were defined by Savickas and colleagues: career concern,



control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas, 2013). Applying these competences contributes to exploring individuals' career-adaptive responses to transitions.

The third theme introduces research participants' critical voices and is called '*Features of educational policy*'. It describes the importance of second chance provision in the given country context and students' reflections on the significant role of policy making in combating early school leaving (ESL). These three themes, together with related sub-themes, will now be discussed.

Overall, this chapter provides evidence of the significant role of second chance provision in the research participants' transitions that occurred after second chance. More precisely, it points out the long-term effects of the experiences and the improvement in knowledge, skills, confidence and motivation. In addition, research participants' life trajectories illustrate how these long-term effects are valued in their careers.

## **8.2 Life-changing experience**

All of the research participants (n=28) who took part in this research from the three countries under investigation argued that attending a second chance provision was a life-changing experience which made them decisive and determined about their future careers. In answering the questions how and why the given second chance provision had been life-changing, research participants specified various reasons that helped them change in terms of their behaviour, attitude and outlook. These included democratic and respectful student-teacher relationships, an encouraging teaching-learning environment, and the role of peers (see Chapter 6). Moreover, the narratives draw attention to the importance of the career education and career guidance, which helped students find a positive pathway after second chance provision. This factor is explored next.

### **8.2.1 Institutional support: the role of career guidance and career education in making the right career choice**

According to a Cedefop survey, career guidance as a form of prevention and/or intervention is a measure explicitly specified in policy documents to combat ESL in Denmark and England. In contrast to the other two countries, guidance is not considered a specific measure for addressing ESL in Hungary (Cedefop, 2015). The differences in the three countries' policy contexts in this regard are reflected in the research participants' interviews (see Chapter 7). For instance, Hungarian research participants did not specifically mention career guidance. In practice, the three educational institutions under consideration provide career guidance and create a learning environment that encourages students to develop their aspirations, choose a pathway, and make decisions about their future careers. This was explicitly stated in the interviews with the teachers and other professionals.

The research participants from the Danish second chance provision praised the work of career counsellors, calling them people 'to whom they can always turn to for advice'. They reported how the career counsellor monitors students' career choices during the school year by following all students' individual projects, which are associated with specific milestones and tasks. For instance, if a student's desired career is dentistry, they have to map every single stage of the route which leads to obtaining the qualification as a dentist, including the first step, such as visiting a secondary school and talking to people, then seeing the university, interviewing a dentist, and then, finally, presenting their findings to peers and making a final decision about the choice. This process enables students to make an informed decision about their careers. In addition, the career counsellor meets students both on an individual and group basis, sometimes also visiting group lessons and providing guidance lessons. For instance, one research participant from the Danish cohort, Karl-Georg (male, 28, DK),

highlighted the essential role of career counselling in finding the right pathway in education after second chance provision to help him achieve his goals. He also mentioned the importance of engaging with work-experience, in addition to his studies, which was also recommended by his career counsellor. Due to his success as a student teacher, teaching appeared to be his desired profession:

I think that it's a very important position [career counselling] to have some kind of person who guides you with big decisions in your life. Luckily, I had good career counsellors at the Support School – you know, they offer you a vision, like, you won't be able to see that yourself, but they offer you a vision of the future with some knowledge, calculated guesswork about the future and that's very valuable. Let's say, with their help I can have the wisdom to make the right choice instead of the wrong one. And actually, they helped me choose HF [a type of secondary education], and at the same time they also told me that I could be a student teacher in an afternoon club. I think I wouldn't have been able to define these important milestones myself, so that gave me kind of vision about a field in which I had none before. Karl-Georg (male, 28, DK)

The English cohort thought highly of their tutors, career advisors, counsellors and social workers, emphasising the complexity of support services provided at Landing College that helped them find the right pathway in education and/or in the labour market after completing second chance provision. Landing College's holistic approach towards students manifests itself in the system of support. In practice, the multi-faceted support system consists of different teams, namely: counselling; chaplaincy; financial; pastoral; nursery; and welfare. There is also a well-being clinic within the team and the careers team (more detail in Chapter 5). According to research participants, the student-friendly college staff, atmosphere and environment keep them on a positive track and help move them into employment or higher

education. Research participants greatly appreciated the collaboration between the different teams for solving students' multi-faceted problems. They also emphasised the importance of the professionals' patience and physical closeness. Additionally, research participants talked about the quality time they had received from these professionals. Finally, they appreciated the career counsellors' efforts to help students find the right pathway if they felt lost about a particular course, or the help they provided newcomers who did not know which course to start at college, or students who wanted to continue their studies at a different level, even if they wanted to enter employment. For instance, Christian (male, 28, Eng) mentioned in the interview that his volunteering placement on the careers team supported his idea of studying shipping at university, which was completely unimaginable for him before joining the volunteering programme, even though it had been his biggest desire since childhood:

To tell you the truth, at that time I wasn't really sure what direction I wanted to take. Up to that point, thinking about the future or going to university was irrelevant because I thought, oh, I can't do it, it's too expensive. And because of what I was doing, working with the careers team, I was heavily involved with a variety of materials for presentations on UCAS [the university application system that students use] and on information about student finance, etc. And this and talking to careers people kind of made me think of uni, I didn't know anything about funding degree courses or stuff like that before, and that kind of put me onto thinking maybe this is something that I could do, and really from there it sort of helped me start my degree, and I recently graduated. Christian (male, 28, Eng)

The interviews with the Hungarian cohort highlighted the anomalies of Hungarian career services and lifelong guidance (see Chapter 4), as the research participants had never had a chance to turn to a professionally trained career counsellor. Thus, finding the right pathway after Helping School was an outcome of a complex process supported by the helper-pair

system, and all the staff, peers and career education classes. Basically, the last year before the final exam involved preparing for the next step. Research participants greatly appreciated that they could talk about their plans with their pair-teachers (see Chapter 4), which were recorded in the individual learning programme (ILP), and as part of the process they could also search for different opportunities on career-related websites (about higher education and/or job opportunities). Additionally, the social worker who was responsible for the career education and guidance at Helping School helped 'finalists' to get to know and interpret different admission procedures, fill in application forms, and/or make phone calls related to career planning. Research participants emphasised the important role of the helping-pair system in finding the right pathway after the leaving exam, as the pair-teacher knew the student's personality, achievements, changes and future plans. The pair-teacher provided expertise and stability for the research participants in this process. For instance, Sarolta (female, 35, Hun) recalled the context of how she became an art historian, and how her pair-teacher facilitated this career choice:

I could not have become an art historian without the inspiration and support I gained in Helping School. In the first year I chose Kata as my pair-teacher because she seemed as much of a perfectionist and sporty as I was, and I must admit it was such a great decision. At the beginning, I did not have the faintest idea about what to become, but then I really enjoyed the art classes and shared my enthusiasm with Kata, who encouraged me to talk more with the art teacher, and then I fell in love with art history. My first intention was to take a GCSE in French, but talking to Kata passionately about art made me realise that a GCSE in Art History would be a bit more relevant. Kata really supported my idea and asked the art teacher about the admission process to the University of the Arts. In the end I got an A, and was

admitted, so this decision could not have been taken without Kata's support, which put me on the right track. Sarolta (female, 35, Hun)

The examples above underpin the significance and effectiveness of individualised career guidance and career education for at-risk students and early school leavers. Individualised guidance supports them in finding suitable career pathways. It should be noted that career guidance in second chance provision includes psychological counselling. Thus, it includes advice and support, developing individual skills and competences, as well as information about career choices to prepare students for the challenges of adult life (Cedefop, 2015). Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996) have underlined the extended role of career practitioners, arguing that career and personal counselling should be integrated in order to support clients to deal with various issues that influence career development.

A Cedefop survey illustrates how education and career guidance are fundamental to helping motivate disadvantaged youth to stay in school and obtain qualifications for the labour market (Cedefop, 2015). The European Commission also draws attention to education and career guidance as a substantial measure for combatting ESL (EC, 2013). Sultana (2012) similarly argues that career education has a positive impact on preventing ESL. For instance, in this research the case of the Danish Support School's everyday practice demonstrates how the career-related activities facilitate students to organise self-, educational- and occupational information to help them make and implement career-related decisions (ELGPN, 2010). In Savickas's words, these activities support students to become 'agents', and later 'authors' of their own lives and careers (Savickas, 2005).

The Learning Theory of Careers Counselling (LTCC) reflects the everyday practice of career education and counselling at the three educational institutions under investigation because it focusses on teaching clients how to make career decisions through learning as an interaction between environment and abilities and emphasises the role of associative learning.

Accordingly, career counsellors use modelling as a key concept. In practice, this theory could help career counsellors identify any unsuitable beliefs held by the students regarding their future careers (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996).

Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996) argue that many career-related decisions can be delayed or influenced; for instance, by family habitus. As a result, career counsellors should provide effective support during the career decision-making process. A number of research participants (n=5) who have demanding, high-achieving parents highlighted the importance of career counselling in convincing parents to let their child follow her/his career choice. As Eszter (35, female, Hun) recalled:

I just recovered from anorexia, and the time had come to think about where to go after the leaving exam/baccalaureate. Mum really wanted me to study law, even though I was really into the arts. Luckily, my pair-teacher was on my side and helped mum understand that it would be a grave mistake for me to study law.

The quotes from the research participants' narratives above highlight the importance of career education and career guidance in motivating students to face their strengths and weaknesses and to gather occupational information that helps them make career-related decisions. The extended role of career counselling in second chance provision appears to be significant in terms of dealing with at-risk students' everyday problems and career-related issues. Therefore, the distinction between career counselling and personal counselling should be erased (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996) if the multi-faceted needs of students are to be supported.

### 8.2.2 Skills, competences and self-efficacy

Research participants' accounts highlighted various changes in their personal skill-sets that they associate with the skills and competences gained in second chance provision. These changes have made a significant impact on their private lives and future careers. The skills and competences most often mentioned in the interviews were confidence, trust, patience, empathy towards others, flexibility, commitment, improved communication skills and self-efficacy. Bandura (1994) defines self-efficacy 'as people's beliefs about their capabilities, which determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave' (Bandura, 1994, p. 2). Bandura argues that a strong sense of efficacy improves people's performance and well-being, and that people with high efficacy tend to consider difficult tasks as challenges rather than as dangers (Bandura, 1994). For instance, one participant from the Danish cohort, Flemming (25, male, DK) illustrated in an interview how the Support School boosted his confidence, and how it contributed to his strong sense of efficacy, which was important to his future career:

I created high expectations about myself, because now I can set standards. I always thought if I can get these grades once, that means I can get them again and I can maybe do better. I made friends, I even became a role model. But now I can apply to my favourite university. I've got so much motivation.

Flemming's account illustratively underpins Bandura's claim that '*the most effective way of creating a strong sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences*' (Bandura, 1994, p.2). In line with this claim, achieving good grades with the help of teachers' encouragement motivated some research participants to perform better, which also boosted their self-efficacy. Furthermore, Bandura (1994) also emphasises how people should be encouraged to believe that they possess the capabilities to succeed, and should be encouraged to master



activities so they can develop skills and a sense of personal efficacy (Bandura, 1994). For instance, it can be argued that second chance teachers' affirmation through creative exercises and verbal encouragement enabled research participants to believe in themselves and to develop a sense of personal efficacy and to eventually get on the desired career pathway. As Andreas (34, male, DK) said: 'I don't know if they were speaking the truth, but the teachers were very good at trying to make you believe in yourself. I suppose it helped me broaden my horizon about what I wanted to do'. Jessica (25, female, Eng) also emphasised the importance of building her self-efficacy and how staff supported her to succeed: 'I built confidence so much, relationships, communication, just everything got better. It's just everything that tutors do for you, all the opportunities and chances you get was just like at the top, it made you a complete person.'

In addition, Bandura argues (1991) that in order to function successfully in different phases of life, the further development of self-efficacy is required; moreover, perceived self-efficacy goes through constant changes. A powerful narrative from the Hungarian cohort exemplifies how the development of self-efficacy helped a drug-addict overcome his addiction, which had had a significant negative impact on his ability to function successfully in his private life and on the labour market. In order to authentically illustrate this long and challenging process, which was guided by the professionals of Helping School, his words are included verbatim below. Kápszi's narrative draws attention to the importance of the contribution of the knowledgeable, patient and tolerant professionals who facilitated his breaking the cycle of drug use/abuse and the development of self-efficacy and a sense of responsibility. The former respondent (40, male, Hun) recalled the story as follows:

Helping School meant a lot to me, they saved my life ... that was the only place where I could not play the typical drug user's games. I was always honest with them, and they saw through me and held up a mirror to me so I faced reality ... they were so

strict, jeez, so hard, even harsh, and consistent with me, they even sent me home sometimes, 'cos I was completely stoned. I spent 11 years there getting the final exam, but I was only conscious in the last two years of my stay. I used and abused drugs for nine years, and they helped me get out of that vicious circle. They changed my life completely, they made me realise that in order to succeed, you have to make a great effort, you have to be responsible and tenacious. I did not go to rehab, they helped me to quit drugs after nine years by taking me to a rehab farm in the countryside and by putting me in charge of organising a summer camp for young addicts named 'Healthy Lifestyle Camp', and then I was clean to face the real world, so, to prepare for the final exams and to find legal sources of financial income. Jeez, it was so hard to wake up, but I did not step back, I went ahead. I felt that I was so small and fragile, so they helped me to rebuild myself from scratch. I did not lie to my parents anymore, and later on, I helped set up a therapeutic centre for drug addicts, we had so many group self-help sessions and then I set up a business, this restaurant where we are sitting now. I did not have enough money, I had to get a mortgage, so it was risky, but since then it has been in the black, and I met my wife and we have two children. I am a responsible dad, you know, and now I have just opened another restaurant and I have 90 employees, more responsibilities, sometimes I hire new arrivals from rehab, ex-junkies, to help them return into society, and I try to use the same helping/supporting attitude towards them that I experienced at the Helping School. (40, male, Hun)

The above quotation clearly illustrates how resilience can influence life narratives when one overcomes obstacles through persistent effort. As Bandura argues: 'After people become convinced they have what it takes to succeed, they persevere in the face of adversity and quickly rebound from setbacks' (Bandura, 1994, p. 3). Bandura (1994) also states that social

models can contribute to self-beliefs of efficacy, or more precisely, similar people can set an example of success that may encourage the observers to believe that, with a similar attitude, they can succeed too. From Kápszi's quotation above it can be seen that following role models influenced his whole career and perceived self-efficacy in terms of goal-setting and sustaining his commitment to them. As a drug addict, he first came across competent models, such as the knowledgeable professionals of Helping School, who inspired him. Later in his career, there was a big transformation after quitting drugs; he became a competent role model in a therapeutic centre who transmitted knowledge and modelled efficacy for drug addicts (Bandura, 1994). His employees (a few of them affected by drugs) also considered him a '*loyal boss*' or a role model who succeeded in escaping the vicious circle of drug use.

Similarly, April's (32, female, Eng) account illustrates how her sense of efficacy and communication skills developed and broadened through professional and peer influences in the voluntary programme, and helped her when setting up her own business:

So at first I was very shy, but then I gained experience about how to communicate and to act around people ... because the tutor treated me as an adult. It felt as though she trusted me, and I was the mother hen for my mates ... and my placement working with people with learning difficulties was really good. Because my new partner's brother has autism, so it really helped and prepared me for that ... I learned how to interact or talk to them by working with them and this helped me understand it more, which has obviously helped in my personal life ... and I got in touch with an entrepreneur when the foreign students were coming over, we wanted her to do a talk, and it was all about enterprise here. So she ran the enterprise programme and at our first meeting I was brave enough to talk to her about my qualifications and things like that, and she helped me start my own business. April (32, female, Eng)

April's story illustrates that an individual's educational career and career choice can be significantly affected by the power of developed self-efficacy. Bandura also claims that (1994, p. 15) 'the higher the level of people's perceived self-efficacy, the wider the range of career options they seriously consider, and the better they prepare themselves educationally for the occupational pursuits they choose'. Likewise, Kapszi's and April's accounts clearly demonstrate the constant development of their self-efficacy facilitated by second chance professionals which resulted in their finding success in their career options – both of them became ambitious enough to run their own businesses.

In summary, the research participants' narratives highlight the significant role of second chance provision in many young people's lives by providing them with positive and motivating experiences and ultimately in helping them gain confidence, self-efficacy, skills and relationships. According to the interviews, these helped them perform better later in education and/or in the world of work. In addition, these narratives supply evidence about how confidence and self-efficacy can significantly influence motivation and resilience to adversity, help set challenging career goals, and also support choices relating to future pathways and performing well in the desired future career.

### **8.3 Successful career**

The second theme that emerged from the analysis of research participants' interviews was a *successful career*, including various career pathways and ambitious future plans. As the previous section has shown, research participants' narratives point to the development of self-efficacy in second chance provision and illustrate how this has contributed to greater opportunities in education and/or in the labour market. Similarly, with regard to personal ties, a number of research participants maintained that they had been able to reinforce

relationships with family members and other members of society as a result of the skills and experiences they gained from second chance provision. Interestingly, one Danish and two Hungarian research participants choose a teaching career and have returned to their former second chance provision providers as teachers. They reflected on what they had learnt from their role models and on their former second chance teacher's personality and methods (see Chapter 7). For instance, they highlighted that second chance teachers' perseverance, patience and dedication towards their profession and young people gave them an example. The rest of the research participants articulated that second chance teachers and the years spent in second chance provision significantly influenced their future careers. Regarding the different career pathways research participants have chosen, it is noticeable that most have entered professions that centre on people/caring professions, such as teaching, childcare, social work, hair and beauty, and hospitality. Others have entered arts-related careers such as directing, music and art history (Appendix 5). The future plans of the Hungarian interviewees stood out compared with the interviewees from the other countries in one dimension: their plans to migrate abroad in the hope of better chances of making ends meet. Unfortunately, this tendency has been widespread in Hungarian society among young people and professionals since 2010 (when a right-wing government came into power), and reflects economic difficulties, serious cutbacks in public spending, and the right-wing populist political climate (Jones, 2016).

The research participants' narratives illustrated important turning points regarding different levels of success and failure. A career, as articulated by Savickas (2013), can be considered boundary-less, and 'as a story that individuals tell about their working life, not progress down a path or up a ladder' (Savickas, 2013, p. 6). By following his model, vocational behaviour can be understood across the life-cycle (Savickas, 2005). Savickas's life-design approach views adapt-ability as a group of attitudes and competencies that influence problem-solving

strategies and help people decide which skills and knowledge contribute to their lifelong learning development (Savickas et al., 2009). In order to comprehend how individuals adapt to transitions in their careers, Savickas and colleagues (2013) construed four competencies: control, curiosity, confidence, and career concern. Control requires the ability to manage one's own situations and circumstances. Curiosity describes how to discover various opportunities in the labour market. Confidence reflects self-efficacy and the capacity to achieve the chosen career goal. Concern refers to an optimistic future orientation that helps plan for tomorrow (Bimrose et al., 2011). These four competencies are used here as an overarching framework to examine how one interview participant from each country under analysis became adaptive over time.

The first example is Fanni (41, female, Hun) who has now been working as a youth worker for eight years in a hall of residence for secondary school students mainly with special educational needs and/or behavioural problems. She is married and has a daughter who has just started primary school. Her narrative illustrates how she has become adaptive having completed secondary education.

*Control:* Fanni's career narrative shows how she has taken control over her career direction. Having dropped out of a secondary school due to behavioural problems and depression, Fanni went to Helping School. During the two years spent in Helping School she was chosen to be a student-assistant who could organise afternoon clubs for newcomers and become accustomed to good practices regarding how to deal with disadvantaged youth. She was found to be professional, and the school leadership offered her a teaching assistant position after the final exam (matriculation). She recalled: 'I remember saying to my pair-teacher that all I want for my future career is to show my passion and enthusiasm to young people.' She stayed there for five years organising various programmes for young people. She decided to study social pedagogy at the university level and started teaching civic education in the last

year of her studies. She mentioned her heuristic experience at university: 'I just realised that all I had experienced in practice at Helping School could be found in books, it was such a relief not to be scared of different disciplines. I just loved reading about humanistic psychology and pedagogy. I knew I had found the right pathway...' After completing her qualification, she applied for a leading position at a youth centre where she spent five *'prosperous years both personally and professionally'*. She then moved to two NGOs to work as a trainer holding trainings for youth workers, and writing tenders for the funding of the organisation of different activities for young people. In addition, she also completed training in behaviour management. 'I worked 12 hours sometimes even at the weekends. Luckily, my husband was so supportive and my enthusiasm made him happy, but there was a point when we decided to start a family...' she explained. She then moved to the student's hall of residence to work as a youth worker with problematic secondary school students, while also providing training for teachers and other professionals. Fanni has been working there for eight years and maintains a satisfactory work-life balance to avoid becoming depressed due to her demanding workload.

*Curiosity:* Fanni's account clearly shows her desire to broaden her knowledge as she has worked in many different settings, experiencing different roles from teaching assistant to senior trainer. These roles have enabled her to express her passion for young people to different audiences. In addition to doing her degree, she also worked as a social worker and a teacher. She has moved the sector in which she works to deal with the same target group from various professional angles. Even though she is satisfied with her current position, she would like to move on to try out a less controlled working environment:

You know I have been here for more than seven years. Having spent a longer period of time in the same workplace, I always need a change; moreover, my daughter is older now, and finally, this student hall of residence is part of the mainstream system,

a bit bureaucratic and not as freedom-oriented as the Helping School – where I became what I am now.

*Confidence:* Fanni is a confident professional, mother and wife, and truly believes in her capabilities. She has held so many positions at different levels, from teaching assistant to team-leader and trainer, where – according to her narrative – she has shown dedication. As she stated:

The confidence I gained at Helping School through peers, teachers’ and later my colleagues’ encouragement has helped me through a number of difficulties ... I kind of learnt that every problem has a solution, which is my motto. I have always experienced support at my workplaces, and I truly believe I support everyone with the best of my knowledge.

In the interview, Fanni mentioned that as a well-acknowledged youth worker she had been confident enough to criticise her *‘role models’* (former colleagues in Helping School) about giving *‘less than we had back in the old days’* in terms of providing individual support to disadvantaged youngsters. In practice, she is in daily contact with Helping School as she has sent students to study there from the student’s hall of residence intake. Once, she was unexpectedly invited to a meeting in Helping School to discuss professional issues concerning this problem: ‘it was obvious that money and time constraints held them back, because of the government’s cuts; basically, they could not hire new teachers even though the number of students had doubled ... by the end of the meeting we made some changes in their timetable to ease their demanding work.’ Thus, Fanni’s constructive comments mirrored the way her teachers (then former colleagues at Helping School) had *‘taught’* her to criticise or intervene when work-related problems occurred. It was also important that her opinion was heard and considered by former colleagues in terms of finding effective solutions. Fanni’s well-established confidence is based on her professional and personal experience, which



allows her to successfully achieve her goals by recognising her strengths that help overcome her depression.

*Concern:* Fanni's narrative highlights her positive attitude towards the future, as seen in her claim that *'every problem has a solution'*, and attitude of *'if there is a challenge, just deal with it'*. She has demonstrated various coping strategies related to her past, present and future that demonstrate her values and passion towards young people. For instance, she restrained her enthusiasm for new challenges when she and her husband decided to set up a family, and applied for a position with regular working hours. Her critical and assertive approach towards professional issues has helped her constructively interact with colleagues and introduce some positive changes to the system. Regarding future plans, she is considering working in a more flexible working environment as her ambitions would be more fully satisfied; moreover, a reduction in family duties would allow her to focus more on her professional work.

The second case that is analysed according to this competency framework is that of Karl-Georg (male, 28, DK), who works as a teacher in one of the youth schools in Øresund City and has the task of organising free-time activities for secondary school students. In addition, he is studying anthropology at university. He lives with his partner in the suburbs. His narrative illustrates how he has become adaptive after completing secondary education.

*Control:* Karl-Georg's career narrative shows how he has taken control of his career direction. Karl-Georg went to the Support School having been *'assessed as not ready to go to secondary education'* because of his severe dyslexia and challenging behaviour. Thus, he was directed to Support School by his career counsellor for a year to develop his academic and personal skills. During the year spent in Support School, he *'became geeky, completely transformed Mathswise, and sociable'* due to the *'inspiring teachers and methods they used'*. He was admitted to a secondary school with a speciality in science, and at the same time attended a scuba-diving course at one of the youth schools where he talked to the head

teacher about his passion for teaching. He summarised his knowledge about role-play and the other activities that he was organising for young people. Surprisingly, despite his young age, he was offered a job: 'I'd just turned 18 and it was the youngest age when you were allowed to teach, and he was like, "Yeah, ok, you are hired", and I was like, "What? Seriously?" He was like, "yeah, let's try it"...'. He immediately built up pleasant relationships with both staff and students by drawing upon his role models' (former teachers at Support School) attitudes towards teaching:

I had this idea that I should be friends with the students if they wanted to be, in the sense that I should both be professional and a friend, so, like, they can have the same cool experience as I had in the Support School, like, where the teachers were kind, too ... It's a very powerful combination.

He also worked as a lifeguard over the summer holidays for five years where he followed exactly the same approach, which helped him deal with '*hardcore youngsters*'. For instance, he said:

Colleagues called the police, actually, and the guys were spat on and had biscuits thrown at them and so on, it was totally chaotic ... but I thought let's try to respect them as human beings, like, being kind and firm at the same time, and then I tried some small talk with them when they did something, and it worked, they behaved.

Karl-Georg has been a teacher in the youth school's professional community for eight years, and has participated in all the teachers' meetings, which he considers '*a kind of privilege*'. He said:

It's been so great to meet my old teachers, and they said like, 'We knew you would become something great', and, well I had the feeling: OK, if I'm here with these

people, these totally cool people, then I must be kind of cool myself, it's like giving me a lot of self-confidence, this is so-so awesome.

Besides his part-time job, he is in his last year of a Masters' course in anthropology and would like to start a doctorate in the same discipline.

*Curiosity:* Karl-Georg's thirst for knowledge and desire to broaden his horizons can be easily traced in his account. Besides his studies, he started working part-time from a very early age in order to put his understanding about education into practice. He has worked in two different settings to '*educate youngsters*', and by attending regular meetings organised by the youth schools of Øresund City he has been eager to learn from his senior colleagues. In order to get deeper insight into '*human behaviour*' he has studied anthropology and intends to expand this knowledge by completing a doctorate in the future.

*Confidence:* After spending a '*year of transformation*' in Support School, his self-efficacy developed and he became a confident young professional who truly believes in his capacity to support and treat young people in the same way that he was encouraged when he was a '*reserved and problematic young teenager*'. His professional confidence expanded further in meetings with his '*role models*' when they acknowledged him as a colleague.

*Concern:* Karl-Georg is optimistic, passionate, and open to future challenges. He appreciates his past experiences in the education system and is grateful for present opportunities in his professional and private life. His experiences have helped him adapt to new challenges related to young people. He always starts the first lesson with a new group of youngsters by saying:

I'm the teacher and hopefully I have a lot of good ideas and I can give you something great, but if you have any good ideas yourself, or if you think that I'm mistaken, or said something that you did not like or anything on purpose, you should feel very free

to speak up, come with your own opinion, criticise me if you want, of course, try to do it in a constructive way, but you should feel free to do that.

This statement illustrates how he takes on and enacts the values he respected in Support School. His intention is to make many young people benefit from the values and positive statements he believes in – for instance:

‘We are all humans and we turn to each other with respect and kindness’; ‘when you die, you won’t regret the things you did, you’ll regret the things you didn’t do’; and ‘I’m the teacher, and if there’s a problem I will try to spend more time with the student to hopefully help a great deal’.

Regarding his future career, his passion for teaching remains, but he would like to try a more challenging environment, such as in Danish academia.

The third example is Kirsty (32, female, Eng) who works as a support worker in a care home for adults with ASD and in a foster care home for young people. In addition to her two part-time jobs, she is doing a Level 3 course in behaviour management. She has a 6-year-old daughter and a new partner.

*Control:* Kirsty’s career narrative shows how she has taken control of her career direction. Due to her low GCSE grades and severe dyslexia she went to college to complete a hairdressing course. She admits: ‘I was slightly more practical than theory-based, so I just decided to do hairdressing.’ Later, she moved to Dubai to work as an au-pair to save up money for her future. She spent two years in Dubai before returning to England. After her arrival in Grey Town she was unemployed for a period and decided to change careers. Her intention was to move on to supporting roles in youth work, but had no relevant information about professional opportunities. She became a volunteer at a women’s centre, and sometimes helped as an independent visitor. In the meantime, she gave birth to a child and

became a single mother. She lived with her parents and '*struggled financially*'. She was desperate to study and tried to ask relevant people in the centre. At the volunteering programme in the centre she met a tutor who told her about the course at Landing College. As she recalls: 'The experience sounded brilliant, it was exactly what I needed at that time ... So it was just like, I say, a foot in the door, a chance to get some experience in supporting areas.' She spent a year in the volunteering programme as a full-time student helping the youth workers, mainly with the 'Looked after children: children in care' (LAC) champion in Landing College. Kirsty arranged to get funding for childcare through the volunteering programme and was able to afford to take her daughter to the college crèche. She became inspired most by following the LAC champion's work, which really encouraged her: '*she always said I'd be really good within the foster system.*' As a result, after leaving college she started working with young people aged 16-18 in care homes (semi-independent living). Her main duties are to 'help girls with things that they might struggle with', 'to teach life skills' and 'to motivate them to go to college and to persuade them not to quit'. After some years working in the foster system, she was eager to find new challenges, so she decided to take on behaviour management related to people with ASD. As she recalled:

If I hadn't had the confidence that I built up in college, I probably wouldn't have gone that way, but it made me want to go more into behaviour. I mean, I dealt with different conflicts, but the adults with autism was new ... something pushed me to wanna see a bit more.

At the time of interview she had been working part-time with adults with ASD for 8 months and had completed two courses (Level 2 and 3) in behaviour management. Her intention is to continue working in the care home for people with ASD for a couple of years, as she said she is 'getting quite a bit of experience and learning a lot about behaviour'.

*Curiosity:* Kirsty's thirst for new challenges and knowledge can be traced in her career narrative. She decided to change career direction many times in order to fulfil her aspirations. She has worked in a number of demanding settings to learn about support work. In addition, she has completed a number of courses to update and expand her knowledge base.

*Confidence:* She described herself as follows:

I think I was confident enough before Volunteering Programme, but there I learnt how to handle pressure in awkward circumstances, which was a real boost to my confidence ... I think I learnt neither to push myself too hard, nor to get involved too much.

She does believe in her ability to fulfil her aspirations and goals. She is also aware of her tendency to get involved with too many activities at once, but she has been working on that.

*Concern:* Kirsty's account illustrates her positive attitude towards her future career as she clearly stated her aspirational goals in the interview. Her past and present experiences mean that she is able to adapt well to the demands and challenges of the labour market by following her aspirations and values. In addition, her assertive nature has always inspired her to expand her future perspectives:

I mean, I was a qualified hairdresser and I hated it, I never enjoyed it. I needed a change, so I experienced loads of different fields in support work. And it gave me plenty of ideas of what to do next within support work. Because all I knew was that I wanted to be a support worker. In the volunteering programme, I learnt that there are a lot of different roles within support work, which inspired me to discover more.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the four career adapt-ability competences provide a framework in which to analyse three success stories in different country contexts. These shed light on the positive long-term effects of the years spent in three different types of second

chance provision, which helped the three research participants to become adaptive in a challenging labour market.

#### **8.4 Features of educational policy**

The third theme relates to the research participants' critical voices that describe the importance and the role of second chance provision in each country's education system and the role of policy making in combatting early school leaving. These critical voices partly stem from the contrasting experiences research participants had in mainstream and second chance education. Besides, as observed, research participants' critical voices also reflect the constructive conversations, open discussions and democratic forums that take place in second chance provision. During the fieldwork, it was salutary to experience how the democratic and equal atmosphere in second chance provision opened students' eyes to seeing and criticising social inequalities and/or anti-democratic values, and the malfunctioning of education systems in the respective societies. For instance, the democratic atmosphere and learner-centred pedagogies of each second chance provision and the egalitarian partnerships between students and teachers clearly encouraged research participants to express their opinions freely, and to approach the world around them with an open mind. Moreover, designated, open student-led forums in these provisions (e.g. the students' assembly in Helping School on each Wednesday) urged students to find their voices. As a result, students explained that they felt responsible for their life events and had a sense of collectivism that helped them shape the rules of their community needed to work together effectively and respect each other's personal and learning needs (see Chapter 7). According to research participants, these activities contributed to their '*critical view and open mind*' towards different issues in society and the world around them, and to become '*reflective citizens*'. The most touching experience

was that of one Danish participant, Ali (25, male, DK), who quoted Martin Luther King by heart in describing equality and the position of minorities in a society. He also mentioned that his English teacher in second chance had drawn his attention to Martin Luther King's thoughts.

During the interview process, one of the closing sets of questions focussed on each country's policy context. I asked respondents, '*What would you advise policy makers to do to change the education system if you were a student representative in parliament?*' in order to investigate what research participants who had experienced '*failures*' in the mainstream education system and '*successes*' in second chance provision would recommend. It is worth mentioning that failures experienced with learning affected research participants' views of the malfunctioning of education systems. Answers varied, reflecting the particular policy context, but those responses that were related to the role of second chance provision in the education system were analogous. Analysis of answers revealed that, even though this question is abstract compared to those, which focus on personal issues, research participants could easily respond. For instance, research participants from the Danish cohort drew attention to '*their privileged positions*' due to the country's well-developed welfare system compared with other countries where education is not free of charge. As Mathias (29, male, DK) stated:

But Denmark has a unique educational system, only the Master's, I think, you have to pay for. All the other [courses] from the basic school, through upper school to the university, the state pays for. And you can get SU [the Danish government grant, from the age of 18 for 6 years]. Actually, I think some students do not think about how privileged they are. They should think about what to do with this education, 'cos they get it for free from the state.



Likewise, Ali (25, male, DK), a young person with a migrant background who experienced racism throughout his career in mainstream education, gave a thought-provoking account, and advised policy makers to consider the position and rights of minority groups in the host society. He stated his opinion in the interview as follows:

The education system? I would probably say that they should pay more attention to minorities. Like minorities, what I say is people from my country, for example, people in my situation. Take care of them more, because if you don't take care of people, like humans, they might end up turning into terrorists or whatever, because they have been treated badly, and they might press the button... They get treated like an outsider. I got treated like an outsider as well, but I just took it in another way. Treat everyone equally. Don't treat them by their religion; don't treat them by where they come from, what they are, how they look, etc. We are all, in the end, we are all human beings. We have to stay together, we have to keep together, and we have to fight together.

Research participants from the Hungarian cohort criticised the government for the underfinancing of education and the social security system. Above all, they expressed their concerns and worries about their and the country's future. Attila (37, male, Hun) exemplified this sentiment with his statement:

As you might know, we have such a useless government. Teachers are underpaid, there is no chalk, markers and paper in schools, and teachers are forced to beg for resources from parents. Look at the Helping School: it has not been renovated for more than a decade, everything is falling apart, and teachers are working there for a miserable salary, doing extra working hours and dealing with trouble makers like I was ... and why? Because the government is not willing to give money. Improving education is not important to them. Not to mention healthcare, and the situation of the unemployed. There are lots of people in a desperate state in my neighbourhood.

Similarly, Marci (40, male, Hun) who was a former student at Helping School, and now works as a teacher there, gave a very dark picture of the education system:

Yeah, financially speaking there is a constant struggle in this school, because we always go on summer holidays with concern and fear that we might not have enough financial support to run the school [when we get back]. There are months when we receive less salary, but the spirit and the fantastic atmosphere of this place keep me working here. I am also worried about my children's future because schools have become so rigid due to the new changes in the National Curriculum, and the government's intention is to suffocate alternative flexible schools like ours.

Research participants from the English cohort also criticised the education system and the government for not paying enough attention to young people's voices, desires, aspirations and needs. According to them, individual study pathways and tailor-made programmes would be very helpful for those students who are considered '*different*' to help them integrate into education, and subsequently into society. For instance, Chloe (25, female, Eng) who really appreciated the atmosphere of Landing College, expressed her opinion about how differences are not considered enough in the education system, based on her own experience:

They should give more freedom and trust 'cos there is a minority that teachers definitely don't trust ... there is always that group of people in every year, they're naughty kids anyway, but like fair enough they would deserve attention. It annoys me when everyone says "all these teenagers..." because no teenager is the same, we differ anyway. That's what I'd probably say: just lean back a bit and don't treat everyone the same.

Similarly, Jessica (23, female, Eng) who enjoyed college life, articulated her opinion about why she prefers college to 6<sup>th</sup> Form:

I would tell them [policy makers] to make 6<sup>th</sup> Form more flexible ‘cos it is too strict for some young people. I did 6<sup>th</sup> form ‘cos my mom wanted me to do it, and I dropped out ... I’ll tell them young people should choose what they want, and then just work hard for it. I know I shouldn’t have gone to 6<sup>th</sup> form, I should have come straight to college. College does many practical things, for example, apprenticeships and volunteering. Because it’s like me, you give me paperwork, it goes over my head, so doing a course is really no good for me, it has to be practical, not theory-based. Like going to college and learning to be a peer mentor in a classroom is just perfect for people like me.

The students’ accounts above draw attention to some features of the malfunctioning of the three countries’ education systems. Danish research participants positioned themselves more optimistically in the given policy context than their English or Hungarian counterparts, as the flexible Danish education and lifelong guidance system (see Chapter 5 for more details) provides them with tailor-made solutions that make them *‘feel acknowledged and supported by society’* Mathias (29, male, DK) and assist them in finding adequate careers.

Regarding the role of second chance provision in the education system, all of the students highlighted in their narratives that the importance of this provision should be recognised by policymakers in order to make secondary education more enjoyable and accessible to students who are ‘a bit different’, and help them get qualifications and a compatible knowledge base so they have more chances in the volatile labour market. As the Danish alternatives in the education system provide more second chance and tailor-made opportunities for young people (see more detail in Chapters 4 and 5) compared to the other two countries, Danish research participants gave the most detailed accounts about how to design a student-friendly education system; their comments were based on reflections of their

own experiences. For instance, Christian (male, 40, DK) placed emphasis on the role of different governments in setting up opportunities for young people:

Depends on what kind of government you have, because when I was a teenager we had a very liberal left-wing one and they created free youth education where you could take a lot of courses, and you could go to different places ... I mean and then under the other government there were some cuts ... you have to find a balance in that. You have to make young people active and motivated and productive. But I think that there is a tendency in the Western world, and there's a conservative way of thinking about education. But I don't think that's good. You'll lose a lot of potential I think, and there is a lot of pressure on young people. Not only from parents, but also from society, and I would advise them [policy makers] to relax and think about it and listen to what young people want.

Andreas (32, male DK) also drew attention to the importance of having student-friendly schools, and made a point about the difficulty of measuring the efficiency of second chance provisions:

So I think if there's a possibility of places like Support School, it should be cherished. They [policy makers] do not see it, like, clearly. But if you look beneath the curtains and try to find the real answers, it's hard to measure something like Support School ... just because the thing is hard to discover or measure it doesn't mean it's bad, so it's very stupid not to respect it. There are so many cool kids, who wouldn't be inspired enough without schools like this ... perhaps, in the long run they might not build a hospital in the future ... so, everything is interlinked, you can't just focus on one element of the circle.

It can therefore be seen that the democratic atmosphere and learner-centred pedagogies of each second chance provision and the egalitarian partnerships between students and teachers made research participants feel encouraged to express their opinions freely and approach the world around them with an open mind. Research participants emphasise the importance of second chance provision, flexible programmes and/or alternative options in the education system; a factor which can be considered a country-independent theme. Moreover, the responsibility and role of governments and of policies in designing learner-centred study pathways that can contribute to integration to the world of work and to society are also highlighted in the interviews.

## **8.5 Conclusions**

This chapter has focussed on participants' perceptions of how they experienced the world of education and/or the world of work after having attended second chance provision in the three countries under investigation. Their narratives provide an account of career pathways experienced by young people in their country's policy context. The most dominant milestone was labelled '*Life-changing experience*', and reflected the positive effects of second chance provision. These effects contributed to managing research participants' lives and careers. The first influential factor that helped research participants define their future goals and careers was institutional support, which varied depending on the country context. Research participants also highlighted the knowledge and skills obtained in second chance provision which have stood them in good stead in education and in the labour market. Following their statements about second chance provision, it could be argued that the second chance years have positively influenced the research participants' careers and personal lives. Their different walks of life, or '*Successful careers*', illustrated various milestones and coping

strategies in their career pathways. In order to describe how research participants managed their careers in education/world of work, individual life trajectories were introduced using Savickas et al.'s (2013) four adapt-ability competences. Applying these competences contributed to an exploration of individuals' career-adaptive responses to transitions from the countries under investigation.

The research participants' critical voices about education systems and society were explored and the importance of second chance provisions were investigated to develop adaptive and motivating pathways for young people to combat early school leaving. This chapter, therefore, provides powerful evidence of the significant role of second chance provision in the research participants' transitions that occurred after second chance. More precisely, it highlights the long-term effects of the experiences, knowledge, skills, confidence and motivation that were developed. In addition, research participants' life trajectories illustrate how these long-term effects are valued in their careers.

## **Chapter 9 Conclusions and Recommendations**

This chapter describes the conclusions of my research and presents implications and recommendations based on three contrasting policy contexts and education systems, including career guidance and second chance provisions. These findings are derived from the educational experiences of young people who were at risk of dropping out and/or who had dropped out of secondary education in three different national contexts – Denmark, England and Hungary – and later obtained a qualification. The former attended second chance provisions that were different from the mainstream because they were designed to support the acquisition of self-efficacy, career adaptability and career management skills which would enable them to find their career trajectory into further education, higher education and/or the labour market.

My analysis focussed on the relevance and importance of different sources of support with special regard to positive relationships such as those between the professionals who provide support and guidance (variously called mentors, teachers, tutors, career counsellors and social workers depending on the country) and students, as well as support provided by peers. All were found to motivate students to remain in education. Through listening to the voices of former students, the thesis presented how the former described their careers at school, their negative experiences in mainstream settings, and their learning pathways in second chance provisions. Moreover, their interpretations and narratives about the influences which they considered important to their careers in education and later in adult life are described.

As discussed in the literature review, the issue of young people who ‘drop out’ and the circumstances of their failure to complete education after the age of 14 has been a subject of debate for more than three decades (Smyth & Hattam, 2004). However, little attention has been paid to understanding the meaning and context of ESL (Smyth & Hattam, 2004). In

order to provide policy makers with a more distinct image of at-risk students and drop-outs in different contexts, my comparative qualitative research has the potential to explore these complexities. The research described the life trajectories of former at-risk students and drop-outs with reference to significant milestones in their mainstream and second chance education, and moreover in their employment history, in three different countries with the goal of highlighting similarities and differences. According to Smyth and Hattam (2004), how young people from these groups experience their careers in education and/or the labour market and their opinions about the potential for improvement are rarely addressed in the literature. Therefore, the research described herein focusses on former at-risk students' and dropouts' career trajectories with a view to mapping opportunities, obstacles and expectations that occur in the three country contexts and identifying typical patterns that allow the presentation of conclusions, implications and policy recommendations.

### **9.1 Conclusions arising from the findings**

The resources available for this study do not allow me to consider all of the measures related to ESL in the three countries under investigation. The analysis has therefore focussed on the main characteristics of the given policy context which are related to understanding ESL, such as second chance provision and cross-sectorial cooperation, including agents from the careers services. In the case of career guidance services, the availability of services mostly in primary and secondary education was introduced.

This research addressed three main areas related to education and training policies (with special regard to guidance), to institutional alternatives offered to at-risk students, and to the supportive teaching-learning environment and its impact on at-risk students' and dropouts' future careers and learning pathways. After exploring these areas, some significant



conclusions are drawn from the findings gathered from the three research field sites. These are discussed below.

### **9.1.2 Career guidance as a source of support for combatting ESL**

The first striking findings are associated with career guidance in the phase of transition from initial education to secondary education. The important role of career guidance in this transition from around the age of 16 emerged clearly from the Danish findings, with Denmark considered a positive example of good practice. The findings indicate that career education and individual career guidance significantly helped at-risk students who had previously dropped out from mainstream education reintegrate into formal education. This process was mostly supported by the Youth Guidance Counselling Centre<sup>23</sup> (YGCC), which is an independent institution whose primary task is to mentor the transition from initial to secondary education. It also helps young people identify their abilities and interests and make informed decisions about their education and employment pathways. The primary target group of these institutions is young people of primary and secondary school age (from year 6 to Year 10). They also support secondary school students until they finish their studies, and those young people who have dropped out. That is, most individuals of under the age of 24 have the opportunity to utilise these centres. Even though counsellors specialise in diverse age- and target groups (e.g. students with special educational needs, or young offenders), since 2003, when the policy environment focussed particularly on this target group, they have typically concentrated on the young people who have dropped out or are exposed to the risk of drop-out (Plant, 2013).

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<sup>23</sup> Known as 'Ungdommens Uddannelsesvejledning'.

**Research participants' voices:** In the interviews with the Danish cohort, the positive role of career guidance was considered a significant source of support. Most respondents emphasised that they would not have been able to 'face reality'; namely, to find a match between their skills, aptitudes and the options available in the education system, without the professional support of guidance counsellors. They were grateful for help with finding a suitable educational pathway after comprehensive school, sometimes even – as two of them stated – against their parents' wishes. Some participants also considered guidance counselling a 'helping hand' in understanding the complicated structure of the Danish secondary education system. A number of research participants (n=7) clearly stated that they would have dropped out of mainstream secondary educational pathways if they had not been directed to the alternative arenas of Øresund City for a year to improve their social and academic skills.

In contrast, career guidance was not as significant in England and Hungary as in Denmark because opportunities were missed to support young people. Findings from England and Hungary highlight that the information some research participants received about careers in education was not specific enough for career transitions (see more detail in Chapter 4). A number of research participants were found to be uninformed about the wide range of educational pathways that they could consider as the school staff responsible for career education and guidance apparently did not have enough relevant information or sufficient training. For instance, in Hungary impartial and independent career guidance is scarcely available to students at the end of primary education before their transition to secondary education – or at any later point in their educational pathways. The common practice in most schools is that career education and career information/guidance are symbolic, so form teachers are responsible for offering career advice, such as introducing secondary education to Year 8 students (this is the last year of primary education before secondary), during a few sessions. The real challenge is that most of the form teachers lack specific training in career

education, and they are not given reduced teaching hours nor any extra payment to complete this important task (Borbély-Pecze, 2010).

**Research participants' voices:** In the interviews with the English and Hungarian cohorts it was pointed out that professional support was not significant in the phase of transition from initial education so a number of participants felt lost in the education system. The latter revealed that they were informed about various educational pathways by parents and peers. For instance, two participants from the Hungarian and two participants from the English cohort had to follow the ideas of their high-achiever parents, so they went to demanding schools. Some chose vocational pathways which were not suitable for them.

It can be conclusively stated that findings relating to impartial career guidance (such as about the transition from initial education to secondary education) suggest that Denmark is a positive example of good practice. In the case of England and Hungary, career counselling should be made more available and should be more personalised at early stages of life, or more precisely, in times of transition such as from initial to secondary education, with special attention to at-risk students. Moreover, it seems that impartial and independent career guidance is also a question of resource allocation, and a decision about what education systems spend their money on. Other research also confirms that it is often challenging to provide access to independent and impartial guidance since satisfactory financial support is not always available for delivering this in schools and colleges (Cedefop, 2015).

#### **9.1.2.1 The ease of availability of career guidance**

Another characteristic of the Danish YGCC that emerged as a notable good practice is the easy availability of career guidance for students. As mentioned above, career guidance is

available in schools and at the YGCC. In addition, counsellors are accessible not only in the centres and in the different educational institutions, but in libraries, youth clubs, sports clubs and employment centres as well, where they cooperate with mentors and other supporting professionals.

Those 15-17 year old students who drop out for any reason must be contacted and reached by a counsellor within five days, and a new form of education or job found for them within 30 days. The job of counsellors in fulfilling this important task is assisted by a national database where every student's career is clearly traceable.

**Research participants' voices:** According to the Danish research participants, easy access to career guidance significantly helped them to identify solutions to various dilemmas and problems related to career and private life issues (e.g. guiding a student to a psychotherapy group to help deal with his frustration caused by his mother's severe depression). Four students who dropped out of upper secondary education stated that they had really appreciated the prompt support they received from a guidance counsellor as this had helped them become motivated and re-involved with education. One of them even stated that he might have become a drug-dealer without the prompt and professional help of his guidance counsellor.

To help individuals find the most suitable path in the Danish education system, students are led by guidance counsellors from the beginning of Year 8. Therefore, according to the findings (for more detail see Chapters 4 and 5) more structured professional support is available to Danish students that is specifically designed to prevent dropping out from secondary education compared with the other two countries under analysis. However, it should be noted that both the Hungarian and the English second-chance programmes provide alternatives to students who are typically older than the majority of the Danish at-risk cohort,

and who have usually experienced more failures, including dropping out of the education system several times (for more detail see Chapters 4 and 5). Reflecting on the Danish good practices in relation to career guidance, policy changes need to be introduced in the English and Hungarian policy contexts that help prevent young people from serially failing in lower and upper secondary education. In addition, young people need youth-friendly centres to be located at their usual meeting places so they can easily obtain information about relevant opportunities in the education system or the labour market.

## **9.2 Second chance education in different contexts**

The second set of striking findings is associated with the main characteristics of different second chance provisions. As the three field sites represent different forms of second chance provision, some features of each institution will now be highlighted.

In general, second chance programmes operate with alternative educational content sets and methods that supplement the traditional school system and lead young people back into the education system and increase their prospects of obtaining formal qualifications. These provisions have resources dedicated to this purpose. They maintain psycho-social support, intensified career guidance and improve mental health (if needed). In line with this, Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996) draw attention to the extended role of career practitioners, arguing that career and personal counselling should be integrated to support clients to deal with various issues that influence career development. The extended role of career counselling in second chance provision is significant in terms of addressing at-risk students' multi-faceted everyday problems and career-related issues. For instance, in Øresund City, due to the holistic nature of the Support School, the learning-teaching process is complemented with intensive guidance counselling. Support School allocates two guidance counsellors to follow each young

person's individual educational and career plans who work together with YGCC on a weekly basis, and also cooperate with psychologists, pedagogical centres, dyslexia centres and psychiatric institutions. Teachers also support students' individual needs, and to help deliver this challenging task professionally they can take part in different forms of training and, if needed, in individual psychology-focused appointments. Besides this, guidance counsellors attend students both individually and in groups, sometimes also visiting group lessons and providing guidance lessons. They also assist with students' administration whose mother tongue is not Danish and/or who are no longer living with their parents.

In Grey Town, the college's holistic approach towards students is an important factor when distributing the budget because they aim to use their finances on a system that supports students in the best possible way. Their well-structured support system consists of different teams: the Counselling Team, which works with external agencies (e.g. the Red Cross), the Financial Team, the Pastoral Team, the Nursery Team and the Welfare Team with social workers and youth workers and a well-being clinic within that team, and also the Careers Team. The main element of this support system is the group of tutors and teaching assistants.

In Paprika City, Helping School has a 'helping pair system', which is the most important element of their supportive atmosphere and ensures personal care and attention for participants. Students choose their helping pair (a person who supports the student on a daily basis) from among the teachers at the beginning of each year. The helping pair and/or partner has a twofold role: first the pair arranges school and administrative matters related to the individual learning schedule of the student; and second, the pair helps manage the student's life regarding mental, family or health problems, social, lodging or employment issues, etc. The school hires one social worker who helps students with family problems and career advice. Helping School also works with external agencies if needed. Unfortunately, they have

no financial support to run a multidisciplinary support team with professionals such as psychologists, supervisors, career counsellors, etc.

**Research participants' voices:** The research participants from the three fieldwork countries really appreciated the different sources of support in the given educational institutions. Research participants with migrant backgrounds from the Danish cohort highlighted that they could not have arranged important official matters (e.g. applying for the SU-Danish government grant) without the help of guidance counsellors as their command of Danish was not good enough to comprehend and use formal language. All of the Danish students emphasised how fantastic it was to be able to openly turn to their guidance counsellor with personal and family issues. Research participants from the English cohort really appreciated the holistic nature of help received from the multi-disciplinary team as most of them had disadvantaged family backgrounds in which problem solving support was scarce. In line with this, research participants from the Hungarian cohort were also thankful for the multifaceted support available at Helping School in the form of the efficient helping-pair system.

Each second chance provision has implemented a holistic approach to challenging youth in which dedicated and qualified teachers, staff members and professionals with specialised skills help young people. In contrast, the everyday practice of mainstream education is different. In the interviews with experts and professionals, criticism about this was expressed in the claim that mainstream teachers are not prepared to deal with challenging youths. These teachers require specialist training programmes that focus on a certain type of pedagogical thinking and attitude, which not only emphasises measurable achievements, but puts the student's personality at the centre and approaches the individual as a whole person.

From the good practices in second chance education, the importance of individual study pathways and learning programmes also emerged strongly from all three countries in the

form of individual educational plans that were formulated for students based on their attributes, abilities and wishes. These pathways are supported with pedagogical methods characterised by innovation, flexibility and personalisation, while developing the skill of ‘learning how to learn’ is of key importance. For instance, a very good example of the wide variety of individual learning programmes is the youth school system (YSS) in Øresund City wherein the institutions are differentiated according to the young people’s needs, and also consider the given local community’s needs. There is an entire spectrum of possibilities for the young people of Øresund. Employees at YSS launch programmes with new educational content and methods as a supplement to the traditional school system with the goal of leading young people back into education (for more detail, see Chapter 4). The greatest advantage of these programmes is that they are a stable part of the education system because they are subsidised by local government which keeps them sustainable in the long run. In contrast, the English and Hungarian second chance provisions’ financial sources of support are not as sustainable as the Danish ones because they receive funds from different sources for a fixed period of time, which keeps these programmes in a state of uncertainty. In summary, it can be stated that more flexible programmes with steady financial support should be introduced into the Hungarian and English education systems to create more opportunities for at-risk students concerning the transition to secondary education – similarly to the Danish system. In practice, the Danish second chance programmes have created alternative learning contexts that adapt to students’ different needs immediately after comprehensive school to help smooth the transition to secondary education. As can be seen in Chapter 5, the policy context makes it possible to adapt flexibly to students and local needs within a short period of time. For instance, there were at least six second chance programmes targeted at different groups of students in Øresund City that provided students with a wide variety of tailor-made programmes after Year 9 (the last compulsory year of comprehensive education) in 2013



when I started data collection. However, the profile of three programmes changed slightly and a completely new one was introduced due to the needs of the student intake of 2014. Therefore, according to the findings (for more detail, see Chapters 4 and 5) more structured professional support is available to Danish students that is specifically designed to prevent dropping out from secondary education compared with the other two participating countries. However, it should be noted that both the Hungarian and the English second chance programmes provide alternatives to students who are typically older than the majority of the Danish at-risk cohort, and who have usually experienced more failures, including dropping out of the education system several times (for more detail, see Chapters 4 and 5).

### **9.2.1 An egalitarian attitude in second chance provision**

A key element of the second chance provisions under consideration relates to the need for students to feel that they are part of a diverse and egalitarian community. This occurs through the setting up and negotiation of school rules and obligations with staff members, and by respecting others and themselves as well. In practice, forums are regularly held in these provisions where students and staff members freely express themselves and exchange their thoughts, problems and dilemmas regarding their everyday lives. In these egalitarian learning communities, so-called active pedagogical methods are applied so students explore cognitive processes and also take responsibility for their own studying (Brynaa & Johansen, 2010). Thus, teachers apply cooperative and interactive methods that treat students as equal partners and help students to become active agents in knowledge acquisition, boosting their confidence and self-efficacy. Regarding study and evaluation, these models are based on a success-oriented pedagogy that strengthens the sense of efficiency. The process of evaluation

is also student-friendly as it is used sanction-based, but allows students to measure the rate of their development (Brynaa & Johansen, 2010).

**Research participants' voices:** Research participants from all three field sites emphasised the positive effects of the diverse student intake which motivated them to get to know each other and to tolerate and accept each other's 'uniqueness' through spending time in the same learning community and by working together on different projects. As most research participants from the three countries under analysis stated after spending a 'year of transformation' in Support School, or 'the best thing that ever happened to me' in Landing College, or 'the most important years of my life in Helping School', their self-efficacy developed and they became confident. Most respondents explained that these years had contributed to the choice of a suitable career and to their adaptability and success in their later careers. In all three countries, longitudinal surveys would be helpful for following these young people's careers and to help identify what motivated them most to remain active in education and in the volatile labour market.

These positive effects on students in second chance provisions might encourage policy makers and educational experts to introduce alternative arenas in the education system that give a platform to students who cannot cope with traditional learning environments. Moreover, these findings might draw policymakers' attention to the need to introduce more student-friendly methods and tools in mainstream education and set up encouraging and inclusive learning environments that capture at-risk students' attention, thereby motivating them in the field of knowledge acquisition and decreasing their potential for dropping out. To help schools as they seek to find a complex solution for these multi-faceted educational, professional and social problems, educational institutions should create networks with local

social, family and youth support organisations and employers (Cresson et al., 1995; EC, 2001; Lafond & Termsette, 1999).

### **9.3 Policy recommendations**

The findings of this doctoral research highlight a number of issues that might help policy makers and educational experts who have responsibility for supporting young people's careers in education and in the labour market. These include:

- First, in line with Danish lifelong guidance good practices, supporting transitions until the age of 25 in England and Hungary would benefit all young people, especially those who are at risk of dropping out. More precisely, mandatory/statutory personalised career guidance should be made available from around the age of 15-16 (or 13 in Hungary, as 14 is the age of leaving primary education) during the phase of transition to secondary education in different settings, preferably in face-to-face or small-group-session format. In order to help career practitioners work with challenging youth, a national database and longitudinal studies on young people's careers could be used to effectively trace young people's career changes. Further transitions later in young people's lives also need to be supported.
- Second, easy-to-access, youth-friendly career guidance centres and youth clubs should be established in towns and cities to keep young people well-informed about their career opportunities in England and Hungary, similarly to the good practices in Denmark.
- Third, as experienced in England and Denmark, Hungarian career practitioners who work in the field should be able to obtain a degree in relevant different subjects in

Hungarian higher education: for instance, a Bachelor's degree, a Diploma degree or a Master's degree in Guidance. New courses should thus be introduced at different universities. In addition, defining national professional standards is also essential for harmonising the work of Hungarian practitioners in the field of lifelong guidance.

- Fourth, the holistic approach to challenging youth in second chance provisions where dedicated teachers and other professionals work together can set a good example for mainstream schools in primary and in secondary education as well. Therefore, policies that support holistic and multi-disciplinary teams focus on students' well-being, learning issues, career education and guidance should be implemented in the Hungarian and English mainstream education systems to help students plan their educational trajectories.
- Fifth, regarding the fact that teachers in mainstream education in all the three countries under investigation seem to lack specific knowledge about how to deal with challenging youth, some courses on this specific target group should be introduced and implemented in initial teacher training programmes. The knowledge base of the courses could focus on effective methods and tools for dealing with the target group, on learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, AD/HD, ASD) and, perhaps, on career education. Alternatively, a single person could be trained in career guidance at each school, and career guidance could be included in the regular in-service teacher-training package. Moreover, teachers should be given basic knowledge about different learning difficulties such as dyslexia through career development training or informative websites so they can help students meet the relevant professionals and/or be taught with tailor-made methods at school.
- Sixth, the positive effects on students of second chance provisions represent good practice. More specifically, more innovative and student-friendly methods, tools and

small class sizes should be implemented in secondary education to create encouraging learning environments and make students motivated about knowledge acquisition and to increase their retention in schools. In addition, it is also important to deal with issues and challenges that influence education more effectively to reduce the number of failures in students' lives and keep them motivated.

- Seventh, similar to Danish good practices, in England and Hungary financially sustainable, flexible secondary education programmes should be implemented and customised to students' individual needs and desires to educate those young people who have left education early due to systemic failures. These programmes could focus on the development of social and personal competences as well.
- Eighth, longitudinal surveys should be conducted to track the target group's (namely at-risk students' and dropouts') careers after secondary education and to identify what they achieve in the labour market, indicating the turning points in their careers and mapping out different sources of support that help them act effectively in the process of choosing a new career pathway.

Finally, and most importantly, the rigid mainstream education systems that are currently in place need to adopt more flexible methods and trained teachers to work with challenging youth. Transitions to secondary education should be supported by career practitioners to help all who are in education find well-fitting and sustainable pathways. These systemic changes can effectively reduce early school leaving, enhance the integration of young people into the labour market and contribute to breaking the cycle of deprivation that leads to the social exclusion of far too many young people across Europe.

## **9.4 Future research**

The comparative qualitative analysis described in this thesis has explored the comprehensive strategies and policy contexts that have been developed and implemented to combat ESL in England, Denmark and Hungary which were found to be substantially different. In addition, this thesis presents results from research into the educational experiences of young people who had been at risk of dropping out and/or who had dropped out of secondary education in three different national contexts but then went on to obtain a qualification. The latter attended second chance provisions, which were designed to support the acquisition of self-efficacy, career adaptability and career management skills, which led them to pursue a career in higher education and/or in the labour market. The research strategy was to explore the context-dependent and context-independent logic of measures and good practices associated with ESL. Having done so, the research moved on to identify emerging patterns in the participants' career trajectories related to schooling and to the labour market using grounded theory. Hence, the empirical chapters contained herein explored how at-risk students and dropouts found suitable career pathways, pointing out country-dependent and country-independent factors. While the effects of schooling, familial background and individual attributes in young people's educational outcomes and status in the labour market have already been the focus of numerous cross-national comparative studies, students' lives and career trajectories have been scrutinised with a comparative lens in much less depth. In practice, cross-country studies predominantly apply quantitative research methods. Therefore, the qualitative research described herein had the potential to be more sensitive to the micro-processes of students' experiences in education and in the labour market, and moreover, their impacts on young people's well-being and future perspectives. However, qualitative research methods are less often applied on their own in cross-national studies. For this reason, this comparative qualitative study could be complemented with a longitudinal survey that

includes more research participants and which could underpin or contradict the findings derived using qualitative methods. Another important goal is to apply the qualitative approaches used in this research to more groups of countries with similar policy contexts – for instance, two or three Nordic countries, in order to shed light on the micro-processes of young people’s careers and life trajectories. Of course, both future types of research could be led by a research team rather than by a single researcher.

To sum up, comparison of three research field sites allowed me to single out themes that are unique to one research setting, as well as others that seem to be specific to national educational environments. However, due to limited time and human and financial resources - typical limitations of PhD research – I was only able to gather and process a restricted amount of data. Therefore, the limitations of my study that arise from the earlier-mentioned reasons do not allow me to conclude with wide generalisations. However, I sincerely hope that my conclusions are of relevance and can make policy makers, experts, teachers and practitioners rethink their everyday practices from a new angle. If so, this thesis will have achieved an important goal.

Finally, a personal note: this thesis and the related journeys, meetings and discussions have contributed significantly to my sensitivity, self-efficacy and confidence as a social researcher.

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## Appendix 1: IER Ethical Approval Form

### Institute for Employment Research Application for Ethical Approval for Research Degrees

Name of student: Szilvia Schmitsek

Academic Year: 2013/2014

Project title: *Dropout-rate reducing strategies in England, Denmark and Hungary*

Supervisors: Professor Jenny Bimrose, Dr Maria de-Hoyos

Funding Body (if relevant): Vice Chancellor's Scholarship

Please ensure you have read the University's Guidance for the Ethical Conduct of Research (<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/rss/services/ethics/statement/>)

<p><b>1. Methodology</b> Please outline the methodology you will use e.g. observation, individual interviews, focus groups, group testing, collection and analysis of data, etc.</p>	<p>The research questions (1. How are the education and training policies (with special regard to guidance) that aim to reduce ESL in the three countries under study designed, and what areas are covered? 2 How do education systems offer alternatives to at-risk students in the 3 countries under study? How could schools adapt to individual needs on the local level? 3What are the main features of a successful cross-sectoral cooperation, which help students retain in school 4 What have made at-risk students to stay in a supportive school and why?) require a mixed-methods design, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data.</p> <p>The fieldwork will take place in three educational institutions located in three countries, England, Denmark and Hungary. Secondary data analysis will complement the findings. An exploration of non-registered forms of dropout-rate reducing strategies and guidance will be carried out by conducting interviews (approx. length between 60-120 minutes) and observations in the three educational institutions under study. The research design includes semi-structured interviews with policy makers, teachers, school leaders in Second Chance Schools, local decision makers, with guidance counsellors, mentors, social workers, and <i>prospective interviews</i> with students/dropouts in educational institutions at the beginning and at the end of a course, <i>retrospective interviews</i> with students after gaining a qualification. I will analyse qualitative data (interviews) performed by using Nvivo software. I will conduct case study description and document analysis. Quantitative data from international and national data sources will be analysed by the SPSS software.</p>
<p><b>2. Participants</b> Please specify all participants in the research (including ages of children and young people where appropriate). Also specify if any participants are vulnerable e.g. as a result of learning disability.</p>	<p>Access to participants will be mainly via E2C (European Association for Cities and Second Chance Schools) with whom I have had professional (previous research, employment) and personal links for 5 years as an active member of the association.</p> <p>Professionals: approx.29, Student participants: approx. 35</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- policy makers (2 in each country),</li> <li>- teachers (3 in each country),</li> <li>- school leaders (1-2 in each country),</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from related institutions such as guidance counsellors, mentors, social workers (3 in each country),</li> <li>- <i>vulnerable participants</i> (as a result of learning difficulty and disadvantaged background): students/dropouts aged 15-17 (4-5 in each country),</li> <li>- students aged 20-21 (5-6 in each country).</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Respect for participants' rights and dignity</b> How will the fundamental rights and dignity of participants be respected, e.g. confidentiality, respect of cultural and religious values?</p>	<p>As I will have to interview and deal with vulnerable groups of people, there are clear ethical considerations which arise in this research.</p> <p>I will be adhering to the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines. The guidelines enable me to weigh up all aspects of the process of conducting my research on dropouts mainly within the school context.</p> <p>The Association considers that all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for: the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research and academic freedom. I will operate within an ethic of respect for every person involved in my research. I will treat all of the participants fairly, sensitively, with dignity, and freedom from prejudice regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant difference.</p> <p>Information sheets will provide an explanation that research participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and can withdraw their data.</p> <p>If a research participant decides to withdraw from the research, their data will be located and destroyed from further data analysis.</p> <p>The participants will be provided with my full contact details and will be informed that they can contact me at any time to inform me that they are not willing to participate in the study anymore or if they have any questions or concerns about the research.</p>
<p><b>4. Privacy and confidentiality</b> How will confidentiality be assured? Please address all aspects of research including protection of data records, thesis, reports/papers that might arise from the study.</p>	<p>The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data is considered the norm for the conduct of research.</p> <p>I must comply with the legal requirements in relation to the storage and use of personal data as set down by the Data Protection Act (1998) and any subsequent similar acts.</p> <p>Data will be kept securely (hard copies will be locked away. Electronic copies will be held on password protected laptops or external hard drives), will be anonymised and accessible only to me as the researcher on the project. It will be maintained for a period of 7 years after the end of the project (e.g. to write up publications and to disseminate the findings at conferences). Participants will also be notified of the procedures (e.g. report to class teacher and/or school leader depending on the location of my research) that they may follow if they believe they have been harmed through their participation in the project.</p> <p>All surnames (town, school, informants) will be anonymised. In those cases, when there is a possibility</p>

	that the identity of the interviewee could be retrieved, I will not only anonymise the names but also disguise identifiable details of the person (age, profession, place of birth, etc.).
<p><b>5. Consent</b></p> <p>a. Will prior informed consent be obtained?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from participants?</li> <li>- from others?</li> </ul> <p>b. Explain how this will be obtained. If prior informed consent is not to be obtained, give reason:</p> <p>c. Will participants be explicitly informed of the student's status?</p>	<p>*delete as applicable</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>As the target group is considered vulnerable I must ensure that all participants fully understand the research process, including why their participation is necessary, how and to whom it will be reported. Participants will be clearly informed that their participation and interactions are being monitored and analysed for research. Working with this group of people I will comply with Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Each participant, including adult participants, will be given an information sheet in their own language. Separate information sheets will be given to the 15-17 years old young people using a language that ensures that they fully understand the aims and methods of the research and the extent of their participation. Nobody will be coerced into taking part. All participants will sign a consent form ensuring their voluntary participation in the research. Separate consent forms will be prepared for all participants - that are specifically targeted e.g for the 15-17 years old- ensuring their voluntary participation.</p> <p>Yes</p>
<p><b>6. Competence</b></p> <p>How will you ensure that all methods used are undertaken with the necessary competence?</p>	<p>Regarding the fact that I have conducted interviews and observations in the last 5 years with different cohorts, and have participated in qualitative and quantitative workshops, I think I have the necessary competence to carry out my research. Additionally, I have completed the Research Methods component of my doctoral training at the University of Warwick. In case of difficulty I will refer to my supervisors for further discussion and advice.</p>
<p><b>7. Protection of participants</b></p> <p>How will participants' safety and well-being be safeguarded?</p>	<p>Within the research I must recognize that participants may experience distress or discomfort in the research process and must take all necessary steps to reduce the sense of intrusion and to put them at their ease with the assistance of student services in the given educational institution.</p> <p>The research has been designed not to intrude upon anyone. Participants will always be reminded of their right to withdraw from the research process any stage. If at any stage during an interview or observation a participant does not wish to answer a question they do not have to continue. I will stop the recording if the participant does not wish to proceed at that time, I will ask them if they would be happy to continue or rearrange the interview/observation. If not, I will not ask them again and will withdraw their data.</p>
<p><b>8. Child protection</b></p> <p>Will a CRB/DSB check be needed?</p>	<p>I hold an enhanced DSB check from England and an enhanced CRB check from Hungary (both are</p>

	current).
<p><b>9. Addressing dilemmas</b> Even well-planned research can produce ethical dilemmas. How will you address any ethical dilemmas that may arise in your research?</p>	<p>Although all surnames (town, school, informants) will be anonymised, those who know the field well have a chance to identify the participants. In those cases, when there is a possibility that the identity of the interviewee could be retrieved, I will not only anonymise the names but also disguise identifiable details of the person (age, profession, place of birth, etc.).</p> <p>School staff might request confidential information from me on students I interviewed. In all such cases I will refer to the consent form and the clauses of confidentiality and argue that only in the cases of serious harm (e.g. risk of bullying or abuse) will I disclose personal information to the responsible authorities.</p> <p>For the classroom observations, the consent of all involved participants will be sought. If a student will not give consent, I will not take notes of his/her activity and include him/her in the analysis in any form. If a teacher will not give consent to the observations, I will not attend his or her classes.</p>
<p><b>10. Misuse of research</b> How will you seek to ensure that the research and the evidence resulting from it are not misused?</p>	<p><u>The confidentiality of personal information</u> All personal details will be made anonymous prior to my analysis, and the audio files containing the original recordings will be stored securely. Electronic data will be encrypted following the IER guidelines.</p> <p>Each participant interviewed individually will be guaranteed full confidentiality. The participants will be made aware in the information sheet and at the beginning of the interview or observation that the researcher and the supervisors will be the only person to have access to the audio files or transcripts and that these will be stored safely and securely in locked and password protected environments.</p> <p>Each individual within the observed sessions will be guaranteed confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality with a group of people will be discussed.</p> <p>In all publications and publicly available documents, the names of the participants will be anonymised.</p> <p><u>The management of research data and records</u> All interviews will be recorded on my own voice recorder and all personal data will be encrypted. The recording will be coded (anonymised) within 48 hours. The transcriber will be requested to delete the voice recording and the document from her computer within 48 hours after completing the work with it. One copy of all anonymised research material will be placed on the university computer.</p> <p>All audio material (interview recording) will be copied to an encrypted USB device within 48 hours after the interview and simultaneously deleted from the recorder. The personal data will be encrypted and I will use passwords which I will select and secure according to the guidance of IT Security Framework (Password Policy).</p> <p>The consent forms collected from participants will be stored and locked at the IER. Consent forms will be archived and destroyed after one year.</p>

	<p><u>Copyright issues</u></p> <p>The copyright of recorded interviews and interview transcripts rests on the participants. Participants will be invited to assign their copyright to the IER. If all collaborators agree, their names will be mentioned in the publications. If all participants agree to indicate their names in an explanatory footnote of future publications, their name will be included as collaborators. This still raises a concern about confidentiality, thus the paper will be sent to all participants to approve the inclusion of their names. If one or more participants do not approve this, all participants will be anonymised. Participants and collaborators will be invited to assign their copyright to the IER.</p>
<p><b>11. Support for research participants</b> What action is proposed if sensitive issues are raised or a participant becomes upset?</p>	<p>The sensitivity of the topic might require support, appropriate referral mechanisms in place. In the event that a participant experiences distress or discomfort in response to the interview I will turn to the student support service in the given school for help. I will stop the recording and if the participant does not wish to proceed at that time, I will ask them if they would be happy to continue or rearrange the interview/observation. If not, I will not ask them again and will withdraw their data.</p>
<p><b>12. Integrity</b> How will you ensure that your research and its reporting are honest, fair and respectful to others?</p> <p>What agreement has been made for the attribution of authorship by yourself and your supervisor(s) of any reports or publications?</p>	<p>First and foremost, I will always discuss the content of my research with my supervisors. As student dropout is one of the most serious problems in the educational systems of many countries and the topic is of key policy interest. I must therefore seek to make public the results of my research for the benefit of educational professionals, social workers, guidance counsellors, policy makers and the wider public concerned with dropout-rate reducing strategies. I intend to communicate my findings, and the practical significance of my research, in a clear, straightforward fashion and in a variety of formats that allow the language to be appropriate to the intended audience.</p> <p>Regarding publications arising from the research, attribution of authorship will be discussed with my supervisors.</p>
<p><b>13. Other issues?</b> Please outline any other relevant issues not discussed above, if any, and how you will address them.</p>	

**Student Signature:**

**Date:**

02/05/2014

*John Jones*

**Supervisor Signature:**

**Date: 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2014**

*Tony Burrell*

.....  
Please submit the completed form to the IER Administrator (Room C0.10)

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**Action taken**


Approved

Approved with modification or conditions – see below

Action deferred. Please supply additional information or clarification – see below

**Signature (Director of Graduate Studies)**

**Date**

15<sup>th</sup> May 2014

*C. Ayatt*

.....  
**Notes of Action**

All earlier points have been addressed and the application has been approved.



## Appendix 2: Photos of daily life at Support School





### Appendix 3: Photos of daily life at Helping School





#### Appendix 4: Photos of daily life at Landing College



### Appendix 5: Table of research participants' career paths nowadays

Participants	Country	Sex	Career Paths
Participant 1	Hungary	Female	university student/translator-interpreter
Participant 2	Hungary	Female	art historian
Participant 3	Hungary	Female	beauty therapist
Participant 4	Hungary	Male	owner of a restaurant
Participant 5	Hungary	Male	teacher
Participant 6	Hungary	Male	university student/nurse
Participant 7	Hungary	Male	designer
Participant 8	Hungary	Female	teacher/social worker
Participant 9	Hungary	Male	designer
Participant 10	Hungary	Female	social worker
Participant 11	Denmark	Male	university student
Participant 12	Denmark	Male	designer
Participant 13	Denmark	Male	event maker/dj
Participant 14	Denmark	Male	shop assistant
Participant 15	Denmark	Male	teacher
Participant 16	Denmark	Male	actor/director
Participant 17	Denmark	Male	teacher
Participant 18	Denmark	Male	sales
Participant 19	Denmark	Female	university student/part-time shop assistant
Participant 20	Denmark	Female	college student/ part-time teacher
Participant 21	England	Female	accountant/owner of her business
Participant 22	England	Female	college student/ part-time teaching assistant
Participant 23	England	Male	engineer
Participant 24	England	Female	college student/ part-time teaching assistant
Participant 25	England	Female	social worker
Participant 26	England	Female	shop manager
Participant 27	England	Male	college student/ part-time shop assistant
Participant 28	England	Male	computer designer

## Appendix 6: Information sheet and consent forms

**Information sheets and consent forms for participants and collaborators** (some sheets will be translated to Hungarian/Danish with minor changes in order to align the information to the different contexts)

1. Policy makers, experts and professionals involved in inter-agency work with schools;
2. School leadership and teachers;
3. Student participants in classroom observation;
4. Participants in interviews.

### **INFORMATION SHEET 1. FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDY (for policy makers, experts and professionals involved in inter-agency work with schools)**

#### **YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET**

#### ***Dropout-rate reducing strategies in England, Denmark and Hungary***

I would like to invite you to participate in my doctoral research. Participation is entirely voluntary. Before you decide whether you want to take part, please read the information about my objectives and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please feel free to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

#### **What is the aim of the research and what are the possible benefits for the local authority?**

The context of the study: The *focus* of my research is to investigate which of the measures against early school leaving on the national and local level help the population concerned to re/integrate into the education system and/or the world of work and above all into society in England, Denmark and Hungary.

My proposed study will contribute a further dimension to student retention by investigating which strategies are the most successful in student retention in the three countries under study and why and by analyzing the procedures in school and classroom levels. Within this research I intend to focus on the importance of personal support with special regard to positive relations as a motivator to attend school.

#### The research project seeks answers to the following questions:

- 1 How are the education and training policies (with special regard to guidance) that aim to reduce early school leaving in the three countries under study designed, and what areas are covered?
- 2 How do education systems offer alternatives to at-risk students in the 3 countries under study? How could schools adapt to individual needs on the local level?
- 3 What are the main features of a successful cross-sectoral cooperation, which help students retain in school?
- 4 What have made at-risk students/early school leavers to stay in a supportive school and why?

Interviews and in-class observations will be carried out to explore student retention strategies of educational institutions.

The doctoral project is fully funded by the Vice Chancellor's Scholarsip.

#### **Who will participate?**

The project will take place in 3 educational institutions in England, Denmark and Hungary. Interviews and classroom observations will involve former students, their teachers, mentors/counsellors/social workers and the school leadership.

#### **Benefits of participation**

The LEA and the school will be provided with a summary of the dissertation focussing on the main findings of the study by September 2018.

#### **Ethics, confidentiality and data storage**



For all involved parties, participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. They are also free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason. Data may be withdrawn until the commencement of data analysis (1<sup>st</sup> December 2015).

Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. All transcripts will be made anonymous and all publications will use pseudonyms and thus the anonymity of the location of the study (LEA and schools) and the participants will be ensured. All data collected will be kept strictly confidential. Raw data will be stored securely for up to seven years after the end of the research at the Institute of Employment Research, University of Warwick.

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact the researcher or her supervisors using the following contact details:

Doctoral researcher: Szilvia Schmitsek, Email: [s.schmitsek@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:s.schmitsek@warwick.ac.uk)

Supervisors: Professor Jenny Bimrose, Email: [jenny.bimrose@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:jenny.bimrose@warwick.ac.uk)

Dr Maria de-Hoyos, Email: [maria.de-hoyos@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:maria.de-hoyos@warwick.ac.uk)

## **INFORMATION SHEET 2: FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDY (school leadership, teachers)**

### **YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET**

#### ***Dropout-rate reducing strategies in England, Denmark and Hungary***

I would like to invite you to participate in my doctoral research. Participation is entirely voluntary. Before you decide whether you want to take part, please read the information about my objectives and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please feel free to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

#### **What is the aim of the research and what are the possible benefits for the local authority?**

The context of the study: The *focus* of my research is to investigate which of the measures against early school leaving on the national and local level help the population concerned to re/integrate into the education system and/or the world of work and above all into society in England, Denmark and Hungary.

My proposed study will contribute a further dimension to student retention by investigating which strategies are the most successful in student retention in the three countries under study and why and by analyzing the procedures in school and classroom levels. Within this research I intend to focus on the importance of personal support with special regard to positive relations as a motivator to attend school.

#### The research project seeks answers to the following questions:

- 1 How are the education and training policies (with special regard to guidance) that aim to reduce early school leaving in the three countries under study designed, and what areas are covered?
- 2 How do education systems offer alternatives to at-risk students in the 3 countries under study? How could schools adapt to individual needs on the local level?
- 3 What are the main features of a successful cross-sectoral cooperation, which help students retain in school?
- 4 What have made at-risk students/early school leavers to stay in a supportive school and why?

Interviews and in-class observations will be carried out to explore student retention strategies of educational institutions.

The doctoral project is fully funded by the Vice Chancellor's Scholarsip.

#### **Who will participate?**

The project will take place in 3 educational institutions in England, Denmark and Hungary. Interviews and classroom observations will involve students, their teachers, mentors/counsellors/social workers and the school leadership. In the cases when a student under the age of 16 is invited to participate, they and their parent(s) or guardian(s) must agree to their participation in the project.

### What will participation involve?

- **Interviews** will be conducted with school leaders, former students, teachers and mentors/counselors/social workers.
- **Classroom observations** will take place in classes for a period of 5-6 weeks, access and timing is subject of negotiation with school leadership, the involved teachers and students aim to minimise the disruption of normal school work.

### Benefits of participation

The school will be provided with a summary of the dissertation focussing on the main findings of the study by September 2018.

### Ethics, confidentiality and data storage

For all involved parties, participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. They are also free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason. Data may be withdrawn until the commencement of data analysis (1<sup>st</sup> December 2015).

Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. All transcripts will be made anonymous and all publications will use pseudonyms and thus the anonymity of the location of the study (LEA and schools) and the participants will be ensured. All data collected will be kept strictly confidential. Raw data will be stored securely for up to seven years after the end of the research at the Institute of Employment Research, University of Warwick.

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact the researcher or her supervisors using the following contact details:

Doctoral researcher: Szilvia Schmitsek, Email: [s.schmitsek@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:s.schmitsek@warwick.ac.uk)

Supervisors: Professor Jenny Bimrose, Email: [jenny.bimrose@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:jenny.bimrose@warwick.ac.uk)

Dr Maria de-Hoyos, Email: [maria.de-hoyos@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:maria.de-hoyos@warwick.ac.uk)

### CONSENT FORM 2: FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDY (for interviews with school leadership and teachers)

Please complete and return this form after you have listened to the explanation about the research.

### *Dropout-rate reducing strategies in England, Denmark and Hungary*

Approved by The IER Ethics Committee.

You should give your permission only if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. If you have any questions arising from the explanation already given to you or require any more information about this study, please ask the researcher before you agree the interview. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

#### Please tick or initial

I consent to my interview being audio recorded.	
I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw immediately without giving any reason. I understand that I will be able to withdraw data up until 1st December 2015.	
I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me in the information sheet. I understand that such information will be handled in accordance with the terms of the UK Data Protection Act 1998.	
I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications	
I agree to be contacted in the future by the researcher(s) who would like to invite me to participate in follow up studies to this project.	

Please indicate whether you would like to receive a copy of the summary of the research findings.	
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--

I \_\_\_\_\_  
 agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Signed	Date
Investigator's Statement:	
I _____ confirm that I have carefully explained the nature, demands and any foreseeable risks (where applicable) of the proposed research to the participant.	
Signed	Date

### INFORMATION SHEET 3: FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDY (student participants in class-observation)

#### **YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET**

#### *Dropout-rate reducing strategies in England, Denmark and Hungary*

I would like to invite you to participate in my research. Before you decide whether you want to take part, I would like to explain the purpose of the research and what participation will involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others. Please feel free to ask me at any time of the project if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

#### **What is the aim of the research?**

My research investigates how schools help youngsters integrate into the education system and/or the world of work and above all into society in England, Denmark and Hungary. For this purpose, I will sit in your classes and take notes about classroom activity for the next three months. I would like to make clear that my role is not to evaluate your performance in any way, and I will not pass on information to your teachers that you disclose to me in the classroom or outside it.

**Who will participate?** Classroom observations will focus on your classes.

**What will participation involve?** Observations will take place in your classes for 5-6 weeks.

#### **Ethics, confidentiality and data storage**

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason. You may withdraw any data until the commencement of data analysis (1<sup>st</sup> December 2015). All data collected will be kept strictly confidential. Raw data will be stored securely for up to seven years after the end of the research at the Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick.

There is no expected risk to participants, but if you think this study has harmed you in any way, please contact your classteacher or the principal for further advice and information. If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact the researcher using the following contact details:

Doctoral researcher: Szilvia Schmitsek, Email: [s.schmitsek@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:s.schmitsek@warwick.ac.uk)



## **INFORMATION SHEET 4. FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDY (participants in interviews)**

### **YOU WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET**

#### ***Dropout-rate reducing strategies in England, Denmark and Hungary***

I would like to invite you to participate in my research. Before you decide whether you want to take part, I would like to explain the purpose of the research and what participation will involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others. Please feel free to ask me at any time of the project if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

#### **What is the aim of the research and what are the possible benefits?**

My research investigates how schools help youngsters integrate into the education system and/or the world of work and above all into society in England, Denmark and Hungary. The discussion will focus on your experiences within the English/Danish/Hungarian education system.

**Who will participate?** The project will involve 20-40 years old former students.

**What will participation involve?** Each interview will last approx. 60 minutes. The interviews will focus on your education and on your career after finishing your studies.

#### **Ethics, confidentiality and data storage**

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason. You may withdraw any data until the commencement of data analysis (1<sup>st</sup> December 2015). All data collected will be kept strictly confidential. Raw data will be stored securely for up to seven years after the end of the research at the Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick.

There is no expected risk to participants, but if you think this study has harmed you in any way, please contact your former teachers or my supervisors for further advice and information. If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact the researcher or her supervisors using the following contact details:

Doctoral researcher: Szilvia Schmitsek, Email: [s.schmitsek@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:s.schmitsek@warwick.ac.uk)

Supervisors: Professor Jenny Bimrose, Email: [jenny.bimrose@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:jenny.bimrose@warwick.ac.uk)

Dr Maria de-Hoyos, Email: [maria.de-hoyos@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:maria.de-hoyos@warwick.ac.uk)

## **CONSENT FORM 4: FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDY (participants in interviews)**

Please complete and return this form after you have listened to the explanation about the research.

#### ***Dropout-rate reducing strategies in England, Denmark and Hungary***

Approved by The IER Ethics Committee.

You should give your permission only if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. If you have any questions arising from the explanation already given to you or require any more information about this study, please ask the researcher before you decide to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

I consent that observation for social research purposes will be carried out in my classroom.	
I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw immediately without giving any reason.	
I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me in the information sheet. I understand that such information will be handled in accordance with the terms of the UK Data Protection Act 1998.	
I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications.	
I agree to be contacted in the future by the researcher(s) who would like to invite me to participate in follow up studies to this project.	
Would you like to receive a copy of the summary of the research findings?	

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Signed

Date

Investigator's Statement:

I \_\_\_\_\_ confirm that I have carefully explained the nature, demands and any foreseeable risks (where applicable) of the proposed research to the participant.

Signed

Date

## **Appendix 7: Anonymised interview transcript (abridged)**

**Ali (27, male, DK) University student and part-time shop assistant**

**Summary:** Ali is a talented young person with migrant background. He grew up with two siblings in Denmark. His parents divorced when he was two years old, his father disappeared. He dropped out of some primary schools and felt 'mistreated by the system'. Luckily, he was guided to Helping School where he gained sufficient academic knowledge and self-confidence to apply for his desired secondary school. He was admitted, and then attended the school successfully. After completing his final exams he went to a university of technology where he is in his second year.

**Start of interview:** I am a Hungarian PhD student from an English university, called Warwick Uni. My research investigates how schools help youngsters, who drop out, integrate into the education system and/or the world of work in England, Denmark and Hungary. The discussion will focus on your experiences within the Danish education system. Thanks a lot for your time in participating in this interview, which should last 45-60 minutes. Your information will be kept secure and confidential.

**Personal information:** name, age, country of origin, current school and/or occupation

**About primary school:**

Szilvia (S): ..... Can you tell me some words about your school experiences from the beginning of primary school?

Ali (A): From the beginning. I used to be a troubled child, when I was a little kid, I had temper, I was like, really quick to get angry. Sometimes it was like the smallest thing stir up everything in me and then I just got angry. Because when I was a little kid I was mistreated by the other kid because I was from another country, ok we are from another country but maybe we are the same people. And all of them, not all of them of course, I am not gonna tell lies but my class mostly when I begin first class whatever. They started mocking me a lot, the teacher started mocking me, and starting like saying everything I said was wrong. I was pronouncing every word wrong even they were not wrong. She would never pick me, like about to ask a question, she never wanted to pick me. I was like raising my hand in the air for like an hour. The whole time in class until I recess she would never pick me at all, she was just looking at me and looking down to the desk again, and if someone else raised the hand she would instantly turned up ohm raised up and go ask what's up what do you need, like that, and sit back. So that got me a very bad place because. The ideas: why are they treating me like this, what did I do for them because I didn't understand all this hatred at that time. In my life I was unlucky because I met only people who tried to let me down so for first grad I got kicked out so ok we got start from the beginning right? When I was a little little kid, I was born and raised in DK. I have had a perfect childhood as a little kid when I didn't step school. My mother family, everything was good, but all get bad later. My troubles first started when I was about six-seven years old when I started school first time. There was like the moment when I experienced people are shitting me, differently that they treating everyone else, so I ask my mom why are they doing this to me, what did I do? My mother told me don't be so judgmental, don't think that people treating me like this because they are different, just stay normal, everyone is normal to you, she didn't want to say it, she didn't want to teach me there is something like racism and whatever. So after that I learned that after the first mistake in the first class I learned that something is wrong with me maybe. My teacher would never pick me as I said before, so that happened was... I got angry. What happened at the end of the class I took my book, I threw it at her right that and I walked out than. After that she got angry, she told the principal that I was the bad kid etc. She said I kept talking classes. I spoke once at class I asked my other friend who was like an Arab as well, I asked him Do you know the question from this book because I don't know what to do, could you help me? And she told us both to shut up anyway. So I was kicked out from that school, I was like seven- eight years old. I didn't even know I was kicked out, so I was kicked out because of that incident, it was considered that time.

Because of that incident I got thrown into like, what can I say, It's like a school for special kids in need. I wasn't a special kid in need but they make me believe that I was. So what happened was I spent my time in a weekly school where you see your family like once every week I spent like a year

there. It was actually pretty okay it was fine like we went to the forest we adventured, we saw all kind of things, I learned a lot from there, what I didn't learn was studying. I didn't learn any mathematics I didn't learn speak better, I didn't learn any languages I didn't learn any history physics what is related.....So I didn't learn anything about, what can I say the real studying, I wouldn't make it at all.

So my mother saw that they were not teaching me anything good they not teaching me at all, and I only saw her once a week. And they were like: if you don't deliver him within these hours we will force take him, and the only reason why she agreed to it, because they said if you don't let him go to this school we will force him, to take him, take to custody, we will take him to some other parents, they gonna take care of him, and she was like, she don't wanna lose her child, you know and she couldn't speak so much Danish because we almost just moved in. My brother, I have an older brother and sister, they like fifteen years older than me they couldn't speak as well but they knew something is going on but they couldn't say anything because they didn't know any people, they didn't know the law they didn't know the police they couldn't do anything because they were new, and people were always being, what can I say, directed them at the wrong way, you don't do this, if you don't do this we gonna do this to you. Anyway, that school I stopped after a year and I got put into another school for kids with special need whatever, but this time other schools didn't want me, because they have heard the story that I was an angry kid, I was bullying everyone, I was a stealer, I was thief, not only that but I was what can I say ADHD do you know what it is?

S: ...Yes, of course.

V: So they said ADHD so that, I mean is that to prohibiting me to calling from every school at the area every so my mother forced to take me to another school they want, kids with special needs goes there, people with ADHD, people who like gets angry destroy everything, but that wasn't right for me, because I was the only kid there who was left out because I didn't do the kind of things they did, there were psychopaths for real, they were psychopaths. So I stayed there for a bit, I was ten years old when I got in, first time I got in, and I spent five years there, five years from ten to fifteen year, you are supposed to learn a lot in a normal school like algebra like English at least physic, chemistry, all these like of science stuffs and all kind of languages all stuff, you have to learn this things before you go into the real world. They didn't teach me anything of this how did I learn to speak, how did I learn to think, how did I learn to research and how did I learn everything. I tried to teach myself by like going online playing the videogame, because that helped me a bit, it was like ok, in this game I could learn English maybe, and that's where I picked up most of my English skills, which is pretty awesome now right?. I asked them could you give me something higher level, because I got better I better, and I faster, because I was practicing at home and people, and people didn't practice at home. So I was like zero, and people know how to read, I don't know how to read when I first joined, so from zero I talked like to the top best student there, I could read, I could speak French like, even I was fourteen even, not fluent, but I could say everything. And I asked them could you give me a higher level they said you have to finish this book before, it was like ok I can finish it. It's easy for me to do this, but it just takes two hours to finish, and when I finish you gonna give me something that is almost the same level, and I won't learn anything from it, could you give me something at my level. It's like for example when I was thirteen years old. They are giving me like five plus five..

### **About Support School:**

S: OK, and who advised you to go to Support School (Ss)? Was it the same guidance counsellor, or how did you get informed about this school?

A: Yes, how got informed was, one my friend he said hey there is a school, the guy who is living there right close to Ss. He said, hey there is a school starting at wintertime, I think it was winter time, around winter time like two months before December. He said hey this school starts at in a, It's like a tenth grade but it's only two month it's all new. When the first people go, you have to go..

S: OK. Were you and your friends the first students to start T10?

A: That was the first people who like started the thing so they were popular. Anyway, I was like yeah, well whatever, we went there to see the intro, and it caught our attention because there was good people, I saw good in them, they were good they didn't discriminate us for what we were. Like a looking, like right. And they were trying to teach us especially like Mette, Lotte and the Maths teacher, they were very good teachers.

Mette, she liked me pretty much. She asked me when I was sick, where are you? why aren't you coming? She sent text messages for like are you sick? Are you Ok?

I only got sick like once or twice because we were dedicated to the school. After that they taught us a lot and they said that I had some potential, so the student counseling thing they invited me. Like this would you like to be like the had of the student counseling, like you can come with your ideas and maybe we can turn them into reality. Hey yeah, sure whatever. I don't know that you have seen the basketball court, the best of all, that was my idea, I told them, hey we need something not for my generation but for people who ever gonna come. We need somewhere some place before this was empty, nothing was there you couldn't play, you couldn't do anything. I said we need some place, where we can play, we can bring our ball, but at least something to entertain ourselves, because we have like the pin ball or whatever like football, or everything, stick, that's all we ever did like one whole school did that table, we would never get the place. She was like all right, that's a good idea, that's a good idea, slowly I opened my mind, like ok, I can do good as well, that's not all bad so, let me try to be more myself and stop pretending to be someone else. I was at the beginning was pretending to be something else because I wanted to be accepted, I wanted to have friends, I wanted to people know me you know? But then I realised the more I did that the more people who get pushed away so I would just be myself and whoever like me for me. They could come, and who ever didn't like me I wouldn't care about it at all. Like right now, the best friend I have is myself. I have a saying like, It's a saying is those like, the reason why you talk to yourself is that people like talk to themselves right? That's because you're trying to seek a confirmation or something are you trying to speak to someone who is wiser than you, and you are trying to speak like. if I... an advice, I speak to someone who is wise right? When you speak to yourself. When I speak to myself I seem as always the wisest person will like the best suggestions. That's why some people do that right? That's like something else..hmmm. So after that my exams and stuffs at Ss I'm starting go up quickly. I started learnig everything I started being more active, I started being like ok, this is the future, This is I have to be better, than I did before, I did better. And my exams, all my exams as well, English: 12, Danish: I think that 7-12 I don't remember, mathematics: I got 7-7 like all and writing, I was still happy that was higher because at ninth grade it was like C, like the level atSs B almost the same as gymnasium. So I got good grades there, and my grades only from those three exams, they were like 9.6 I was really happy about that after that I heard about the first gymnasium. And I thanked all of them because they helped me through, they tried to do, they tried to make a difference who need, people who need to continue right? And I think everyone from that class they passed, so we started another school a gymnasium called HF gymnasium.....

### **About society:**

S.: Why do you think it was so hard and challenging for you in Folkeskole [comprehensive school]?

A: Society have been trying to push people like us, and I'm saying this out of my view, and I still love everyone equally all of them, I don't hate anyone, except for like people who don't behave nicely, I hate them, I don't hate them but I dislike them. Sounds like, ok, you don't try to push me down. I have to learn ten times more than they do, before I can get acknowledged. I read a book, like one guy, I love Marthin Luther King. Why? because he had the same problem. Because he was like, and in the black community and white community he could get along, he had to study tenth harder than every white students do, just to get accepted in to a collage. And he did that, he was super smart, and they finally acknowledged him. It's approved this is just a body that I'm borrowing, inside in me is a soul, and you have blood, as the same as you, as same as a black guy, as same as a yellow guy. All the same.

So, I thought ok, I have to push myself harder, so I did that, and luckily I went to Support School to feel equal....